

just the same but brand new by ellieoh

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alpha Steve Harrington, Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Anal Fingering, Anal Sex, Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield Bonding, Billy Hargrove Has a Crush on Steve Harrington, Billy Hargrove is trying to be Better, Billy Hargrove-centric, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington friendship, Billy is a little obsessed with Steve, Blow Jobs, Enemies to Friends to Lovers, Eventual Smut, Explicit Sexual Content, Hand Jobs, He Just Doesn't Know It Yet, Knotting, M/M, Mating Cycles/In Heat, Omega Billy Hargrove, Post-Season/Series 02, Post-Season/Series 03, Robin knows whats up, Steve Harrington Has a Big Dick, Steve just needs a nap, Steve just smells really good, Very little angst tbh, billy is now part of the gang, eventually Post-The Battle of Starcourt, good friends nancy & jonathan, major pining, so Beta Steve Harrington at first, the yearning is major you guys

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Heather Holloway, Jonathan Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Tommy Hagan, Will Byers

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Summary:

They haven't spoken since the night at the Byers.

Since Billy beat Harrington's pretty face in and the kids had left him on the floor of some freaky house, dosed up to hell.

Billy sees him at school and watches the bruises fade from his pale skin, tries to ignore Steve the best he can. It's what he's supposed to do, what he told Max he'd do. So he watches the colors of Steve's face come back to normal. Watches the light in his eyes sort of fade.

Billy ignores Steve Harrington until he can't anymore.

Because Steve doesn't look good, and Billy was never able to leave a scab alone.

or,

Billy sees Steve Harrington sitting alone at lunch and just can't help himself from getting involved. He just needs to keep reminding himself that he's not interested in Harrington - he's not. (He is.)

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

someone on Tumblr asked for a/b/o harringrove and I couldn't resist!

Billy watches Steve Harrington slink out of the cafeteria and sit at one of the abandoned picnic tables that litter the courtyard, alone.

He's all by himself, not a Wheeler or Byers in sight; picking at a sandwich he bought inside, expensive jacket wrapped tight around him to ward off the chill. It was cold, more than cold, more than Billy was at all used to with his West Coast blood. But that doesn't stop him from leaving the cafeteria and his gaggle of followers to smoke in peace.

Billy leaned against the side of the building, shivering, and finished his cigarette as he watched Harrington. It wasn't something he liked to admit, even to himself, but watching Steve Harrington had been a preferred pastime for him since he rolled into this cow-town. He tried to do it less often now, or so he told himself – but seeing as Billy felt like he watched Steve now more than ever, it was a lie.

They hadn't spoken since the night at the Byers.

Since Billy beat Harrington's face in and the kids had left him on the floor of some freaky house, dosed up to all hell.

Billy sees him at school and watches the bruises fade from his pale skin, watches the bags become more and more prominent under

those doe-eyes. Ignores him during basketball, in the hallways, at parties, in the parking lot of the arcade.

It's what he's *supposed* to do. What he told Max he would do. It's also what he does because of the squirming bundle of guilt that sits like a rock in the pit of his stomach every time he thinks about landing punch after punch against Steve's pretty face.

He's upset that he did it. Upset that he had hurt Steve like that, let himself get out of control, scared the kids the way he had. He had wanted them scared in the moment – fueled by anger and self-hatred and sadness. But now... well, now he didn't.

So, Billy watches Steve Harrington from November to January. Watches him sit with Wheeler and Byers during lunch, surrounded by them in the halls, in the car together outside of the arcade and in the school lot. Watches the colors of his face come back to normal. Watches the light in his eyes sort of fade.

Billy ignores Steve Harrington until he can't anymore.

Because Steve doesn't look good, and Billy was never able to leave a scab alone.

He tosses his cigarette and moves toward him and that lonesome little picnic table without really thinking.

This will either end up being be a good idea or a fucking terrible one.

Billy's committed either way; he probably owes Harrington a few good shots anyhow. He plops himself down easily across from Steve and tries not to let shivers rack his body from the chill. Being out in the freezing January cold for too long without a proper coat probably isn't the smartest idea he's ever had. But, then again, neither is this one.

He places a can of soda down in front of Steve's obliterated sandwich and waits.

Steve, for his part, looks confused.

There's a sharp little divot between his brows that Billy can easily read as anger, but the rest of him looks strangely relaxed. Like if Billy wanted to hit him, Steve would just let him.

And Billy doesn't like that shit at all.

He looks like he's given up. Like he's too exhausted to care about Billy and what his fists could do. It's scary, how much anger fizzles through him at the sight of Steve all pliant and resigned.

Steve looks from the can of Coke to Billy and back again.

"Here." Billy says roughly, hands shoved quickly into the pockets of his jacket to ward off the cold.

Steve looks at Billy dead in the eyes and Billy struggles to keep the contact. It's the Omega in him, the subconscious urge to defer. But Billy had worked hard to train that part of himself away and Steve Harrington *wasn't* an Alpha. Billy shouldn't want to submit to him, even though he kind of does.

And wasn't that just the root of the problem right there.

"This your idea of an apology."

Steve's voice is rough; angry, Billy realizes. Eyes narrowed and jaw tight.

Billy sighs a little to himself. He should've known that it wasn't going to be that easy. Not with someone like Harrington – someone who used to be *king*, someone who was used to getting what he wanted. Someone like Steve wouldn't see the olive branch for what it was and just take it as is, no, because that would just be too easy.

"Yeah. It is."

Steve looked a little taken by that, like he hadn't expected Billy to actually admit that he was trying to apologize. Or answer at all, apparently.

When Steve didn't say anything, Billy sighed again and pulled out the cigarettes from his pocket and lit one, placing the pack on the table in easy reach of Harrington. Another peace offering, another olive

branch. He took a drag, let his gaze wander from the unopened can of soda to the palates of blues and purples beneath Steve's eyes, they spoke of exhaustion. Billy would know.

"The plate was a dick move."

Steve just looked at him; that disappointed sheen never leaving his eyes, the angry furrow still stuck between his brows.

"That seriously the best you can do?"

Billy took a deep drag, let the smoke linger in his lungs until they burned and let it out on a sigh. He rubbed his eyebrow in a practiced move, a habit he'd yet to break.

"I'm sorry." He said gruffly, glaring at the can of soda between them.
"Better?"

Steve softened a little, though his eyes were still narrowed in a glare. Suspicious of the actual apology, but gentling from it.

"It's a start."

Billy snorted a little, finding himself curbing a smile at Harrington's attitude. *There he is*, he found himself thinking. *There's the king.*

“I promised Max I’d lay off, so.” He took a drag, let his eyes sweep over Steve’s hair and his strong hands and the length of his neck above the collar of his coat. They were quiet for a moment, Billy looking at Steve and Steve looking at the soda and cigarettes between them. “We gonna talk about it, or what?”

Steve’s brow furrowed in confusion at Billy’s words and for a long moment, he did nothing but look at Billy – who tried not to squirm. But then, he slid the can closer to himself and popped the tab. Billy tried not to let that stupid Omega part of his brain feel like he’d *provided* for Harrington or whatever. It was an apology Coke, so they were square. An olive branch accepted – that was all.

“Um, we are?” Steve took a sip, confusion lining his voice. “Talking.”

Billy again had to curb a smile at Harrington’s perfect combination of prissy attitude and dopey cartoon. “About the monsters, you dingbat.”

Steve’s eyes went wide in a way that made him look like fucking *bambi*. It was obnoxious and Billy wanted to kiss his stupid face.

“W-what?”

Billy raised a brow and waited him out. Steve sputtered a little, looking around like some guy in shades and a suit was going to pop out and toss them into the back of a van. He looked around like Wheeler and Byers were going to show up and save him.

“Look, the kids gave me some wacky bullshit story that went in circles, but I saw that thing in the fridge.”

“You did?” Steve leaned forward, eyes wide with horror and Billy had to actively fight the urge to comfort him.

Harrington was fine, he didn’t need Billy shushing him like some sad pup. And Billy didn’t even want to do it – fuck, he didn’t even *like* Harrington. Or so he was trying to convince himself.

“Yeah.” Billy leaned back a little, smoking the cigarette and looking at Steve critically. “I did. Woke up in the freaky house all alone, fucked outta my mind, and that thing fucking plopped right at my feet when I tried to make it to the sink.” He took another drag. “The kids gave me some insane nonsense while you were passed out in the back of my car, but I’m not an idiot.”

Steve sighed – a deep, heavy one that spoke of exhaustion and a bone-weariness he wouldn’t have expected someone like *Harrington* to understand. He reached out to the pack of cigarettes Billy had purposefully put within his distance and took one, lighting up. “What did they say?”

He shrugged a little and tried not to let his gaze linger too long on the way Steve’s lips looked wrapped around the cigarette. “Tried to sell me some story about a how it was one of curly-cue’s science projects gone wrong or some bullshit.”

“Why didn’t you believe them.” Steve asked seriously, eyes boring into his.

“Because I’m not fucking stupid?” Billy scoffed. “There’s no subspecies of lizard that’s getting that fucking big or has that many fucking teeth. And also, Max refused to look anywhere but directly into my goddamn soul. She only does that when she’s got a lie to sell.”

“Huh.” Steve sat back a little. Ashed the cigarette and pulled his gaze away to frown at the table between them.

“I told them to fuck off. They know I don’t believe them. But, I just needed to get Max home at that point, so I let it drop.”

Steve looked back up at him, chewing on the inside of his lip like he was trying to decide if he wanted to say something or not. He’d seen it on Max enough times to know. She usually didn’t say anything at all.

“So, you gonna tell me, or what?” Billy pushed, hoping to make the decision for him.

Steve’s brown eyes were big and wide as they looked into his, contemplating whatever was stewing beneath all that hair. He looked nervous, he looked tired, and for once, Billy really did want to be included. Wanted to be in the know. Wanted to slide himself into a group and not have to be in control or in charge or battle for top dog or whatever.

Fuck – he kind of wanted to be Steve’s *friend*.

“You done being an absolute asshole?”

Harrington was serious. His eyes still wide, still pretty and dark, but he no longer looked like a damn cartoon deer. This was the Steve Harrington that had stood outside of the Byers house, hips cocked, ready for a fight. A fight he knew he wouldn't win, but a fight he went all in for anyway.

Billy suppressed a shiver at the tone of Steve's voice, the stern look in his eye. Suppressed the urge to bare his neck. He didn't bare his neck for anyone but Neil – and that certainly wasn't by choice.

He could feel the attitude bubble up within him. The urge to snap and snarl and tackle Harrington to the ground and show him who the real alpha was here. To protect that fleshy part of himself he tried so damn hard to keep hidden.

But that wouldn't garner him any favors, would only push him ten paces back from this moment.

And – he didn't *really* want to, he was finding.

Didn't really want to push Steve away. Not when he'd come this far. Not after finding out how much he enjoyed having Steve's whole attention, without the added hate and distaste and anger that layered over top.

“That depends.”

Steve sighed a little, like he'd been expecting Billy to fall back into being a jerk. Like he was disappointed. “Yeah, on what?”

Billy waited until Steve looked back into his eyes. He tilted his chin a little, letting his shoulders lose a little of their stiffness, some of his mask slipping. “We square.”

He could see the exact moment that Harrington softened. His shoulders literally slumped – like the wires holding them up had been cut – his eyes losing a bit of the harshness. He reached up with his free hand and swiped it through his hair in a way that would've totally wrecked Billy's if he'd run his fingers through like that, but it only managed to make Harrington look more attractive.

“Yeah,” He said in a voice much gentler than before. “We're square.”

Billy nodded and tried not to let himself feel much more than relief. He didn't want to fight with Harrington anymore. Not when he knew that having Steve on his side was an actual option.

“So,” Billy said conversationally around a drag. “Tell me about fucking monsters.”

Steve, in fact, would not tell him about fucking monsters.

At least, not out in the open.

Made Billy trudge all the way to his fancy car, turned up the heat real high, and answered what he could of Billy's questions.

The car smelled like him; Billy realized. Clean and warm and potent – for a Beta, anyway. It was a nice smell, a good one. It made Billy want to lean back and rub his scent right along with it, muddying it up until he couldn't distinguish one from the other.

It was a dumb thought, one he pushed down as far as he could, as quickly as he could. Harrington looked both tired and jittery; wired in a way that spoke of exhaustion and fear. Once he started talking, Billy could understand why.

“So, you're telling me, that those little fucks befriended a military experiment and now said military is hunting her down while trying to open some fucking... space portal?”

Steve nodded a little absently, eyes darting from the tree line to the school and then back to Billy. “Basically, yeah.”

Well, fuck.

Billy asked questions and Steve tried his best to answer them. Some,

he just plain didn't know, others he couldn't even begin to find the words. Billy didn't push him. He could smell the fragility on Harrington right now, sense how little it would take to actually break him apart.

It wasn't something Billy was used to wanting – the urge to go easy on someone, to actively protect and not attack. Especially when that someone was like Steve Harrington.

Because Steve Harrington was a problem. The kind of boy Billy needed to stay far away from if he wanted to make his own life any easier. Billy didn't often have this kind of issue, mostly because he was angry and mean and people didn't want to get close to him. And, more often than not, he didn't want to get all that close to people either.

And yet, here was Steve Harrington. Sitting in his car with the guy who had punched his goddamn lights out and made his life hell for the first two months Billy had been in town. Answering his questions and accepting his apology soda and *moving on*.

The fucking nerve of him, honestly.

They sat in the car for the rest of the period, sharing another cigarette and moving on to topics that were far safer than government experiments and monsters. Topics like school and parties and the new line up at The Hawk. Harrington was easy to get along with when Billy wasn't hellbent on getting under the guy's skin. Charming, even.

Dangerous, Billy thought to himself.

The next day, Billy dropped off Max without so much as a sneer in her direction and made sure to park as close to Harrington's fancy car as he could.

Harrington, of course, wasn't in it. Because that would be too easy. Billy ducked into the school and attempted to loiter around Harrington's locker, but no dice either.

So Billy went to class and pretended to fuck around while actually taking notes. Billy was an asshole with a certain kind of reputation to maintain, but his goal had always been to get away from Neil. He couldn't do that with shit grades. He looked for Harrington between classes but seeing as Harrington was in the grade above him, most his classes were in another hallway.

Billy itched to see him. Which, was annoying. He shouldn't *need* to see Harrington. Shouldn't feel that slight tremor in his fingers at the thought of Steve's exhausted eyes. He knew it was a stupid Omega thing – the wanting and the doting and the need to sooth – but it still rankled him that he'd basically imprinted on Harrington like some stupid pup and was now jonesing for a fix.

Frustrated, Billy stalked to lunch, a stiffness to his shoulders that he had started to shake after his little heart-to-heart with Harrington returning full force. He avoided Tommy's shouts and the jeers from the usual lunch table and made his way over to where Steve sat,

flanked by Wheeler and Byers. Just as he always was these days.

They were talking lazily, Steve half staring out the windows, that exhausted, faraway look in his eye. But his mouth moved to answer them, his fingers toyed with the fries on his plate. He was with them, but only partially. Billy had to tamp down the urge to run a gentle hand down the back of Steve's neck. He bit his own cheek and told himself to knock it the fuck off.

Billy sauntered to their table and just... sat down.

Wheeler and Byers stopped talking immediately, their eyes hard and sharp and confused. Steve turned from the windows to look at Billy, raising a brow when he realized just *who* had sat down beside him. Billy said nothing, just looked between them and leaned back in the hard cafeteria chair, lazily displaying himself like he was in casual company and not a group that basically hated him.

"Can we help you?" Wheeler asked pointedly with a raised brow.

Billy shrugged a shoulder, letting his mouth fall easily into a smirk. He was about to open his mouth when Steve cut him off.

"Nance." He sighed in a way that was very clearly a plea. She looked back at him confused.

Billy tugged Steve's picked-at plate of cafeteria food toward him and began to eat what Steve wasn't. He ignored whatever conversation

the three of them were having with their eyes as he finished off Steve's burger and picked through the fries.

The implication of Steve *letting* him was not lost on anyone.

"Steve said you'd know more about the monsters than he would." Billy said eventually, pulling a can of soda from his pocket like he had the day before and popping the tab. "So, tell me about monsters."

Wheeler's eyes began to widen and pop as she looked between Steve and Billy. Byers mostly looked like he was about to faint.

"Obviously we don't know what you're talking about." Wheeler started, shoulders high and tight in discomfort, voice a little hard.

"Save it, princess." Billy took a sip from the can before placing it on the table between him and Steve. "I know you know what I'm talking about. So, spill it."

"*Steve.*" Wheeler looked at him pointedly and Steve sighed, running a hand through his hair.

"Just tell him."

"You're kidding, right?" Byers asked quietly, looking slowly between Steve and Billy. "He kicked your ass." He said gently, like Steve

needed reminding.

“Yeah, well, so did you.” Steve said tiredly with a shrug, avoiding Byers gaze and the sad slump to his shoulders. Grabbing the can of soda, he took a sip and Billy tried not to fucking *preen*. “Look, we’re square, or whatever. So just... tell him. He knows anyway, he saw the demodog in the fridge.”

Wheeler looked around like anyone would be listening to them, like anyone cared enough to. And even if they were – who the fuck would know what a *demodog* even was? *Billy* didn’t even fucking know what it was.

Steve and Wheeler eyed each other intently, neither backing down. Eventually Wheeler sighed and her gaze cut to Billy.

“Fine. But we’re going outside. We’re not talking about it in here.”

Billy shrugged. “Fine by me, princess. Lead the way.”

Wheeler’s eyes narrowed at the nickname. “Don’t call me that.”

Billy just smirked.

They all stood, and Steve grabbed the trash around the table, piling it up on the empty tray. He shoved an untouched pudding cup into Billy’s hand and grabbed their shared soda with his free hand. Billy

followed him as he dumped the trash, taking a sip of the soda, and followed the other two outside. He smiled to himself as he watched Steve take another sip, then scolded himself for caring at all. Tommy called after them as they walked by and Billy just threw the finger over his shoulder without looking.

They walked to the empty, snow-covered bleachers, surrounding the empty, snow-covered baseball field. Wheeler sat inside the mostly untouched dugout, Byers following her and leaning against the inner wall. Billy and Steve leaned along the fence, facing them.

Billy licked pudding off the spoon and raised a brow at Wheeler. "Alright, I'm freezing my fucking ass off, so, talk."

Wheeler crossed her arms over the chest of her bulky winter coat, cheeks flushing all prettily with the cold. Or anger. Probably both. Billy obnoxiously licked at his spoon and avoided Steve's dark eyes.

"What do you want to know."

"Why don't you just start from the top and we'll see where we end up." Billy said with a raised brow.

And she did.

She started from the beginning – their beginning – adding in whatever they had learned from the kids, from Chief Hopper and Byers' mom. Billy listened, interjected when he had a question or

comment, but mostly listened. Honestly, he sort of wished he was taking notes so he could revisit this later. Because there was no way he'd remember this all shit.

There were monsters in Hawkins. And - Billy had already known that, okay? But hearing it, seeing the way Steve sort of disassociated from the conversation and Byers trembled and Wheeler got angry was another thing entirely. How the fuck could he not have known?

He needed to have a talk with Max.

2. Chapter 2

Billy got through the rest of the day with the knowing that he'd see Harrington later on when he was dropping Max off at the arcade.

Because he always saw Harrington at the arcade - though, at this point in their relationship, they didn't usually acknowledge one another. Now would be different, Billy knew.

There was an understanding between them now. An acknowledgement. Billy had *apologized* – something he wasn't particularly known for.

He wondered if Steve realized how big of a deal that was for him. Wondered if he understood the implication. Probably not. Why would he? Why would Steve Harrington suspect that Billy couldn't get him out of his mind?

He could feel Nancy and Jonathan's gaze on him during the couple classes they shared toward the end of the day. Knew that Nancy didn't trust him one bit. He got that, respected her for it. For keeping an eye out. It was smart of her.

Byers was another story.

Billy couldn't really get a read on him – the guy had this sort of quiet gentleness about him, like a stiff breeze would blow him over. But he couldn't get Steve's words from lunch out of his mind. A guy like Byers – tired eyed with shaky hands and hunched shoulders – had

knocked Steve's lights out.

He remembered Tommy spilling about it when Billy had asked about the way things worked around here. Went off about how a mousey little garbage-eater like Byers had laid the former king right out. Over a girl no less, a prissy underclassman not worth anyone's time.

Billy knew a lot about being underestimated. He wasn't going to discount Nancy and Jonathan, not anymore.

His mind wandered as he took notes, ignored the whispers from the girls surrounding him, and finished a pop quiz. He thought about Harrington's exhausted eyes and sloped shoulders. He thought about the jut of Wheeler's jaw, the wide leg of her stance. He thought about Byers' searching eyes that saw more than he said. He thought about what they'd told him out in the snow-covered dugout.

Monsters.

A psychic little girl.

Portals to – *fuck* knows where.

Billy thought about that night, going over it all in his head – *again*. Because when wasn't he thinking about that night? About his back pressed aggressively against the wall, his father's angry scent in the air, Susan's worried blue eyes staring at him over her husband's shoulder. About finally getting Harrington on his back, but absolutely

not the way he had wanted – or, maybe exactly how he'd wanted? It was complicated. About blood and tears and the smell of fear in the air. About a needle in his neck and Max's angry face standing over him.

But if Billy looked past all of that and thought about the story the kids had spun that night, about the weird drawings literally plastered over every inch of that house, of the Christmas lights nailed to the wall above a written alphabet, about the fucking nail-bat and the reason there had been a tranquilizer there at all –

Well, the idea of that *thing* falling from the fridge to his feet didn't actually seem so crazy, did it?

Billy ignored Wheeler and Byers' looks as he sauntered out of their last period class. He stopped by his locker to grab what he needed for homework and all but fled to his car. Steve was already gone by the time Billy got out there, but Billy ignored the little dip of disappointment he felt, and just drove over to the middle school to pick up Max. He'd see Steve later, hopefully with more info after squeezing it from Max.

They haven't really been speaking. Which, isn't a surprise or that much of a difference in their relationship, if he was being honest.

But, Billy had promised her he'd leave them alone, so he had. They didn't fight, mostly because they didn't talk, but both his dad and Susan seemed happier because of it. Their mutual ignorance of one another had let Billy have the best couple weeks he'd had since moving to this fucking cow-town.

It wouldn't last though. It never did.

Besides, they needed to have a chat.

Billy smoked while he waited, mind whirling with thoughts of what the fuck was lurking beneath this weird little town, of the kids and Harrington facing off against those *things*. Of petite little Nancy Wheeler with a gun in her hand. Part of him wished desperately to be back in California – away from the cold, from *monsters*, from Harrington – but a bigger part of him was curious. He wanted to know more.

Eventually Max and her nerd friends meandered out of the school, talking in a little pack before disassembling and going off their own ways. Baby Byers and little Wheeler unchained their bikes and went off in one direction, while Curly-cue and Sinclair went off in the other, Max watched them go before boarding over to the Camaro.

She got in without a word, tossing her skateboard and backpack in the backseat. She waited, but Billy didn't move, didn't peel out of the parking lot at his normal break-neck pace. She looked at him with confused, furrowed brows. Billy noticed that her jaw sort of jutted in a way similar to Nancy's, but the fire in her eyes was all him.

Max didn't speak first – because she wouldn't deign to show him weakness, not since that night at the Byers, the night she'd knocked him out cold and then fed him a crock of shit. Instead, she waited him out. Eyeing him with increasing anger as he slowly finished his cigarette. Once he dropped the stub out the window, he turned towards her.

“So, Harrington told me about the monsters today.”

And that had clearly not been what Max had expected him to say. At all.

Her brows went confused, then her eyes went wide, her mouth flapping a little as she struggled to formulate the words that wanted to come out. Billy just raised a brow as he waited her out. She'd get there eventually, and they had nothing but time.

“*What?*” She finally sputtered.

Billy shrugged. “Finally talked to Harrington, Byers, and Wheeler. Told them what I saw that night at the house and the bullshit story you lot tried to feed me. Asked them to tell me the truth. They did.”

“No.” Max shook her head, defiant. “They wouldn't talk to you. You're lying.”

“The fuck I am.” Billy shot back. “You can ask Steve yourself at the arcade.”

“Oh, so it's *Steve* now?” Max said, eyes bright with anger

“Fuck off. *Harrington*, better? Now,” He pressed on. “Why don't we have a fucking conversation, hmm?”

He put the car into drive and began their journey home. He didn't ride the road like he normally would've, not actually wanting to kill them while they had this chat. He waited expectantly, brow raising as he looked from the road to Max.

"Any time now, Maxine."

"Fuck off." She growled, crossing her arms tight over her chest. She was chewing at the inside of her lip and Billy could tell she was warring with herself over something. "What do you want to know?" She ground out eventually.

Billy felt his shoulders deflate a little as he sunk back into the seat. He sighed, loosening his grip on the steering wheel. He could see out of the corner of his eye that Max began to do the same.

Her posture often mirrored his unconsciously, she didn't know she was doing it.

It always made something in him coil when he noticed, because he was about eighty percent sure that Max was going to eventually present as an Alpha and the fact that she mirrored him the way she did meant that she saw him as *her* Alpha. Or, at the very least, someone her subconscious looked up to. *Respected*.

But Billy *wasn't* an Alpha, no matter how loudly his presence screamed the opposite. Max knew that. She knew that Billy was an Omega, had always known, and yet... some part of her still thought

he was someone worth mirroring. He wasn't.

It was complicated.

He pushed the thought of Max and designation away and pressed on about the topic at hand. "Tell me what you know, and I'll fill you in on what the fucking *Brat Pack* let slip."

Max narrowed her gaze, arms still crossed over her chest, though not as tightly as before. "No. You tell me what *you* know, and I'll decide if I'm going to tell you anything."

"*Max.*"

"*Billy.*" She snapped back.

Billy let out a deep sigh, attempting to hold back his anger. "Fine." He said sharply, lighting another cigarette. "I know about the portals and the creepy crawlies and your little psychic friend."

"El?" Max shot back instantly, eyes wide. "They told you about El?"

Billy looked at her but didn't let his suspicion show on his face. Her reaction gave him even more questions. "Yeah," He shrugged casually. "Harrington told me. Then Wheeler tried to explain some more. So, she's some sort of experiment?"

Max looked like she was struggling, like she wanted to keep her mouth shut and like she didn't. Eventually she dropped back into the seat and let her head flop back against the headrest. "Yeah." She sighed out. "Something like that."

She went into more detail, telling Billy about the lab and how the boys had found her wandering around alone and how she was connected to Baby Byers alleged 'death' last year. Told him about what had happened, really happened, that night that he'd shown up at the Byers and nearly beat Steve half to death, told him about the shit that had went down while he'd been knocked out cold.

Steve had told him some of it, Nancy and Jonathan filling in some of the blanks where Steve couldn't, but Max was now giving him a complete picture. Especially of that night.

"You can't tell anyone." Max said seriously, once she was done going filling in the missing gaps of the story. Her eyes were wide but hard, her jaw set in that way that reminded him a little of Wheeler standing in a snowy dugout – hip cocked, feet planted, ready for a fight.

It made him angry.

Actually angry.

The words themselves, but also the way they'd fallen so easily from *Max's* lips, wrapped in that self-righteous tone. When he looked at

her then, he knew that she understood. But the guilt-riddled expression that had fallen over her face did nothing to calm the *hurt* and *anger* that welled up inside of him.

“And where the hell was that conviction when we were back home?”

His voice was hard, slicing through the air between them and Max looked down at her hands, away from the anger in his eyes.

“I’m sorry.” She uttered softly.

“Because *I* can keep a secret, Maxine.” Billy pressed on, ignoring her words; hands so tight around the wheel that his knuckles turned white. “Historically, *you* can’t.”

“I’m *sorry*.” Max looked up at him, defiant in her apology. Her eyes were shiny, and her lip bitten raw, but Billy refused to feel sorry for her. Refused to feel bad, not about this. Not when she had all but ruined his life. “You know that I am.”

Billy pulled his gaze away from her and set his eyes back on the road, ignoring the way they glazed over a little. He wasn’t about to cry in front of Max, he cried enough as it was. *Weak*. The voice in his head sounded like Neil.

“I know.”

They left it at that, pulling up to the arcade. Max looked at him, but Billy said nothing. He wouldn't look at her, not right now. When she got back into the car at four-thirty, maybe then. But not now.

Max sighed and unbuckled herself. She grabbed her bag and her board from the back and got out of the car. The door didn't slam shut and it was the first time since November that it'd happened.

Billy watched her slink into the arcade to wait for her little nerd squad, blowing out a deep breath he'd been holding in. He pressed his hands to his eyes and rubbed them a little, feeling the wetness there. *Weak.*

He lets himself relax, breathing out through his nose, letting the air linger in his lungs. Eventually he pulls his hands away from his eyes and lights up another cigarette. At this rate, he'll be out of a pack by the end of the day.

Steve rolls up not long after. Billy watches him park in his usual spot, watches the nerd squad practically fall out of the car and race to get inside. Steve shuffles out, shaking his head sort of fondly and watches them go. Then he turns his head, looking around. He spots Billy.

He looks good, Billy thinks. He likes the way Harrington stands with his hands on his hips, likes the length of his legs and the width of his thighs hidden beneath clinging denim. He likes the way Steve fills out his sweater beneath the ugly jacket he always wears. Likes the way his dark hair flopped and tucked behind his ears, how the cold air made his lips look red.

Billy gets out of the car.

Harrington trails over to him – it's not a swagger, not like the one Billy had perfected. No, it's more of a strut – confident, with a slight swing to his hips, barely noticeable. Billy noticed. He averts his gaze from Steve's hips and tries not to flush at the sight.

He's better than this. He's not going to fucking *swoon* over Steve Harrington's hips.

He takes a drag of his cigarette and leaned back against the window of the driver's side door; eyeing Steve as he came toward him. Steve settled beside him, leaning against the car and pulling out his own pack of cigarettes, lighting one up. Saying nothing, acting like this just something they do every day, even if that couldn't be farther from the truth.

Billy watched Steve take a deep inhale, gaze inappropriately dragging over the line of his throat as his head tipped back, and Billy hated himself for not being able to look away. Steve turned toward him and pulled the cigarette from his lips.

"I'm trying to quit." He held up the cigarette between his fingers, wry little grin settling on his lips.

"Yeah," Billy huffed a little around the cigarette dangling precariously from his own mouth. "Sure looks like it."

Steve rolled his eyes, but it held much more of a playful edge than Billy had ever seen Steve direct his way. "I said trying, didn't I?"

Billy hummed and took another deep drag, hoping to settle that squirming, desperate part of himself that tended to awake in Steve's presence. They stood side by side quietly smoking for a while, just looking at the sky and the trees surrounding them. Billy wasn't used to so many trees, wasn't used to the quiet stillness that pervaded Hawkins. It made him itchy.

Eventually Steve breaks first, turning his head to look at Billy after he flicked away his used filter. "Did you talk to Max?"

Billy sucked in a slow, deep breath through his nose and let it out through his mouth as he dropped his own filter and crushed it with his boot. "You could say that."

Steve didn't say anything, but when Billy flicked his eyes over, he could see Steve was still looking at him, only now with raised brows. He was waiting for Billy to fill him in, waiting on Billy to make the next move. Billy brought his thumb up to rub at his brow and looked away from Steve's dark, prying gaze.

"She filled in some gaps. Didn't believe me when I said you'd told me, not a first." He shrugged casually, then brought his arms to cross over his chest. He knew it looked defensive, he didn't much care.

"Can't say I blame her." Steve said easily and something sick twisted in Billy's stomach. Something must've shown either on Billy's face or in his body language because Steve crossed his arms to mirror Billy,

causing their shoulders to brush. It settled him more than he'd like to admit. "You told her we're cool now?"

"Sure did." Billy tried to ignore the flush of warmth he felt from the slight brush of their shoulders, from Steve's words and the casual confidence in which he said them. "She told me more about that Elle chick and the shit that went down while both of us were knocked out that night."

Steve nodded. "Good." He decided. "You should know."

Billy hummed again in response and they were quiet for a little while, just leaning side by side on Billy's car. Eventually Steve piped up again and they started talking about school and basketball and if Billy was going to try out for any spring sports. It was easy – to shoot the shit about surface-level stuff, to talk about things that didn't actually matter.

Because they didn't talk about monsters, or Max, or some psychic girl named Elle, or the bruises that had finally faded from Steve's skin, or why Billy had even been looking for Max that night and why he was always so angry. They just... didn't talk about it.

And, it was companionable. It was *nice*. To be in Steve's presence without the posturing, without hiding, without the angry simmering beneath his smile. To have Steve's attention solely on him, to have the attention be *soft* and *comfortable*.

It was dangerous.

Because Billy could easily see himself getting attached to this Steve – which didn't bode well considering he'd already *wanted* Steve before all this, before any of it really. Fuck, did he want Steve.

Wanted to bury his face in Steve's warm neck, wanted to feel those hands on his skin, on his hips, holding him down. He wanted to see Steve's eyes to go soft, wanted to feel that smile pressed against his lips. He *wanted*. Ached for it.

But Billy couldn't have that, Neil had made that perfectly clear.

Dangerous.

But Steve Harrington was *pretty* and soft underneath his wide shoulders and muscled arms. He had fire, he *pushed* back at Billy – but not in the way that Billy was used to. Because Steve didn't try to dominate Billy like all the other Alphas and High School *Kings* he'd met, didn't try to knock him down a peg because of his attitude or designation. No, Steve hadn't tried to fight Billy at all. He just wasn't taking Billy's shit. And that sort of fascinated him.

He had wanted Steve's attention from day one, and now he had it. Now he had Steve Harrington standing next to him, talking to him, listening to him – how was he ever supposed to give that up?

The door to the arcade opened as they were talking about baseball and Billy watched as Max stood watching them carefully with furrowed brows. Billy eyed her but answered Steve's question about

his favorite position – and hearing that come out of Steve’s mouth would’ve *absolutely* gotten him at least a little hard if Max hadn’t shown up and stolen his attention away. She stalked over to them; face still settled in that confused angry little pout.

“Ready?” Billy barked out as she approached, startling Steve.

He looked over Billy’s shoulder and saw Max, then smiled at her. Max seemed to settle a little seeing Steve’s smile and, honestly, Billy could relate.

“What’re you doing?” She asked accusingly at them, hands gripping her board aggressively.

Billy rolled his eyes, “Fuck off, shitbird.”

Max just glared at him but didn’t seem all that put-off by his words. She was getting too comfortable. She slid her gaze from Billy over to Steve and raised an accusing eyebrow.

“You guys are leaving already?” Steve asked toward Max but then slid his gaze over to Billy, directing the question at him.

“We have to be home before five.” Billy replied with when it seemed like Max wasn’t going to answer. And, honestly, he didn’t really want Steve asking question as to why.

The less he had to lie about Neil, the better.

“You guys are really talking now?” Max asked Steve, looking a little lost and she glanced between them.

“Oh, um,” Steve shoved his hands into his pockets and Billy literally could not help but notice how it framed his hips, making the bulge in the front *really* stand out. Billy was going to be picturing it all night. “Yeah, we are.”

Max gave him the stink eye and looked between Steve and Billy suspiciously, like they were lying to her.

“Get in the fucking car, Maxine.” Billy finally growled.

Max just glared back but stomped off to the passenger side, slamming the door closed behind her. Billy rolled his eyes at her attitude and looked at Steve, who was attempting to curb a small smile.

“See you tomorrow, Hargrove.”

“Yeah.” Billy managed, sliding into his car and ignoring Harrington’s smirky mouth and the urge to tackle him to the ground.

Billy was a little bit fucked, wasn’t he?

3. Chapter 3

So, as it turns out, things between him and Harrington have become... friendly.

Since the can of Coke and the cigarettes and the *tell me about monsters* and the arcade, Billy often finds himself much less alone with Harrington around all the time. Between classes, during practice, waiting for the kids, there Steve was. They'd chitchat, smoke a few cigarettes, generally just be in each other's company.

But they weren't friends, Billy thought firmly to himself.

Friends told each other real shit and made plans for after school and like... did things together. Like Harrington and Byers and Wheeler or like Max and the brat squad, hell even like Tommy and the guys from the basketball team.

No, Billy and Steve were not friends. Not yet.

But things were better, Billy was finding. Better than he'd ever dared to dream they'd be with Harrington. Definitely different from how they'd been before.

Before and after. It was always *before* and *after* when it came to Billy.

Before Hawkins; *after* California. *Before* the night at the Byers; *after*

the apology soda. *Before* his mother left; *after* Susan came into the picture. *Before* he presented; *after* the doctor said Omega.

A series of befores and afters that made up his entire life. Billy tried not to think of them if he could help it.

He'd begun sitting with Harrington and Wheeler and Byers at lunch, even though he thought it was weird that Steve's only friends seemed to be his ex-girlfriend and her new boyfriend, but, Billy didn't actually have any friends so what the fuck did he know?

He also told Tommy to *fuck off* any time he opened his mouth to try and ask what the fuck was going on when Billy trailed after Steve in the cafeteria. He tolerated Nancy and Jonathan, barely made fun of them really, held back the cutting remarks that were too mean. It was downright kind, is what it was.

He'd chat with Steve before basketball and in the locker room after. They'd fuck around in Gym class, when practice wasn't real or all that mandatory, playfully challenging each other and showing off what they could do. It was fun, easy in a way it had never been before, not since California, not since he left home. Having Steve actually push back, smiling as he tried to knock Billy away or laughing as he attempted to steal the ball made Billy fucking lightheaded.

Then, after school, they'd lean against one of their cars outside the arcade and smoke as they waited for the kids to finish. Max was always done first and they always left before the Harrington caravan. Steve didn't ask why. Though, Billy could tell he wanted to.

So, they weren't friends. But they were friendly. And that, well, that was more than Billy had hoped for when he gave Harrington that can of soda in the freezing cold.

He almost felt like he was getting away with something. Like he'd conned Harrington into being nice to him, like he didn't deserve the warmth or kindness Steve had slowly began displaying in his presence. Billy tried to push those thoughts away as they came.

Harrington was a big boy, if he didn't want Billy around, Billy wouldn't be around – simple as that.

So, they'd fallen into a sort of weekly routine. Billy wondered if Steve had noticed it, noticed how much time they had begun to spend together, or around each other. Circling each other's orbits enough to be noticeable, enough for it to matter. At least, it mattered to Billy, anyway.

Steve was a little clueless, so, Billy was willing to wager a guess of probably not.

Or, maybe he did. Maybe Harrington was just lonelier than they all thought, and Billy was the next best thing to actually having a friend. Billy could live with that.

There was a lot he'd put up with if it meant Steve smiling at him.

Currently Billy was walking from his seventh period class and sort of

meandering the halls to waste time, a little bit lost in his thoughts. He had his notebooks under one arm, his free hand shoved into the pocket of his denim jacket, his eyes sort of glazed over as he thought about his newfound *friendliness* with Harrington and what it all meant when he heard his name.

“Hargrove!”

Billy turns immediately without thinking at the sound of Steve’s voice. Which – is annoying. He wouldn’t turn around, like a damn command, for anyone else. But, here he is.

He narrows his eyes a little, mostly annoyed at himself, but waits for Steve to catch up to him. He’s got a small smile on his face that Billy’s convinced he doesn’t realize is there as he trots over to where Billy’s waiting.

People pass them with a small look of either confusion or gossip-mongering interest. Billy ignores it as Steve comes up beside him and holds out a small Styrofoam container. “Here.” He says and presses it into Billy’s hands.

Billy knows that his brows are furrowed in confusion as he looks at the box Steve is pressing into his hands. “What the fuck, Harrington?” But it doesn’t come out as gruff as it might’ve before they became... this.

And Steve doesn’t even react to the words leaving Billy’s mouth, just sends him a *look* before tapping the warm container in his hands.

“It’s French fries.” Steve says easily. “One of the lunch ladies still finds me charming, so.”

He shrugs his shoulders a little, like it’s no big deal.

Billy knows that he looks annoyed, can tell by the way Steve’s shoulders sort of set a little, like he’s ready for a fight. But he can’t help it – Harrington just gave him *food*.

Sharing what was left on Steve’s plate was one thing, splitting a can of soda was one thing, but this? This was a whole other situation.

“Why the fuck are you giving me food, Harrington.”

The *you know how this looks* left unsaid.

Because while Steve Harrington was a Beta and everyone thought Billy was an Alpha – the implication was still there.

Steve had just tracked Billy down across the school to give him food. To *provide* for him. In teenage dynamics lingo that was as good as him asking Billy to fucking prom. It had *intent* or, at least, it could. It would, if they were different people.

Steve shrugged and literally waved his hand like the mere notion of

what Billy was subtly implying was ridiculous. And maybe it was. Maybe that didn't mean the same thing here as it did at his old school. Maybe the mere thought of Steve Harrington, outcasted former king of Hawkins, wanting anything to do with Billy Hargrove and courting *was* ridiculous.

Billy tried not to let the sour taste in his mouth spread.

"You didn't eat anything at lunch, and we have basketball later. Can't have you passing out on me, Hargrove."

Steve never asked where his lunch was. Some days Billy came in with a brown paper bag of whatever he'd managed to throw together that morning at home and some days he'd have money for hot lunch. And some days he didn't have anything at all.

Billy couldn't really say out loud that he'd pissed Neil off, so his dad gave him enough money for gas or food, but not for both. He couldn't say that, so he was glad Steve didn't ask. Glad no one did.

He accepted the stupid fries and tried not to let the squirming in his stomach reach up to his throat like it wanted to. The Omega part of him downright purred with satisfaction at having the dumb boy he liked provide for him, as minimal as it was. The actual functioning part of his brain told himself to shut the fuck up.

Billy rolled his eyes but popped open the lid and shoved some in his mouth. Steve watched intently, shoulders only dropping once Billy started to eat. They walked together to their next class, ignoring the kids in the hallway that stared openly at the two of them being

friendly.

Everyone knew about their fight and everyone knew that Billy had won. The fact that the two of them were now sharing food and sitting together at lunch and talking openly was spreading fire through the rumor mill.

Because Billy had rolled into Hawkins furious and heartbroken and overwhelmingly sad, and he had taken it out on everyone in his immediate vicinity. He'd taken it out specifically on Steve Harrington. This was not the Keg King that the population of Hawkins High had gotten used to, this is not who they'd signed up for.

Sure, Billy was still annoying and gruff and mean, that hadn't changed. But the things they believed about him had started to.

He had rolled up and immediately challenged the former king and stolen his crown. Billy had charged at Steve Harrington, headfirst, from day one. It was just something that everyone had come to accept and know – Billy was an aggressive Alpha asshole and had proved once and for all that Steve Harrington was done.

And now, they were *friendly*. Now Billy sat with him at lunch and walked with him in the halls and accepted his food.

Smiled at him, laughed with him, prowling the hallways together the way Billy and Tommy used to, the way Steve and Tommy had before that.

Hawkins High did not understand, so they did what they could – which was start rumors.

The current rumor sweeping through the school?

Billy had fought Steve for *Nancy*. That's why the two of them had broken up at Tina's Halloween party, that's why Steve had spent all of November mottled with bruises.

Because *Billy* had wanted *Nancy Wheeler* and fucked Steve up to get her.

Billy just laughed, because they couldn't be further from the truth if they'd tried. Billy would sooner fight Nancy for fucking *Byers* than what they were claiming. Ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous.

Steve honestly didn't seem to care – which was the interesting thing.

Because if it were Billy, he'd care.

He would care that everyone thought the worst of him. He would care that no one liked him or wanted to give him the time of day. He'd care that everyone he had grown up with suddenly turned their back on him because he didn't want to be what they wanted him to anymore. Billy's carefully cultivated persona was evidence of just that.

But Steve –

Steve Harrington wasn't really like anyone Billy had ever met.

Because Steve *didn't* care. Not really.

Apparently, he used to. Back before Billy had rolled in and punched his way to the top. Apparently, according to Tommy, Steve had been *it*. Had been exactly what you thought of when someone spoke of a High School king.

Wealthy, beautiful, cruel.

If the stories were true – which, sometimes when he walked the halls with Steve or sat with him outside the arcade, Billy had a hard time believing they were – Steve Harrington had been an asshole. A mean bully of a Homecoming King who fucked his way through half the school and truly just... didn't care. About anything – except his status.

Billy couldn't imagine the Steve Harrington who carted around a carload of annoying brats not caring. He couldn't imagine the Steve Harrington who still sat with his ex and her new boyfriend because they were *bonded by trauma* not caring. Couldn't imagine the Steve Harrington who forced food into his hands on the days where he didn't eat lunch not caring.

Billy sort of wished he had known that Steve, but he's glad that this Steve is here now. Because while Billy can certainly play rough, he gets enough shit at home. Steve's kindness, no matter how small, soothes something deep within Billy that he tries not to examine too closely.

The old *King Steve* would have been fun to break down, would have given him a thrill, a real sense of accomplishment, would've had him hard and aching to pin down that sort of guy and had him bear his neck for an *omega* like Billy. There was an excitement to that, a longing to prove himself against someone worthy.

But this Steve...

This Steve seems to actually sort of *get* Billy in a way that's terrifying.

Steve never asks him about the food, or why him and Max have to be home so early, or why Billy will sometimes show up at school a little more exhausted and angrier than usual. He never asks. But Billy can tell that he *sees* something. Maybe even knows something.

Whatever it is that Steve might've seen or might've known, he keeps it to himself. He never changes his tone when he talks to Billy, never gives him questioning eyes or pity. He just shoves food into Billy's empty hands and talks his ear off about some inane bullshit like school or sports or, more recently, the kids.

And he appreciates that. It actually fucking touches him that Steve doesn't treat their relationship any differently even if he does suspect something. Appreciates that he never *asks*. Because if he did, then

Billy would have to stop talking to him and, at this point, it would be really fucking hard.

Billy's *attached*. It's a problem.

He thinks about how Harrington smells when he gets off at night. Thinks about his doe eyes and his *mouth* and his wide hands and his fucking shoulders as he squeezes his cock or rides his fingers and chokes down noises that he'd be embarrassed if anyone else actually heard.

He thinks about Steve when he's not fucking himself, too.

Thinks about the sound of Steve's voice and the way he oscillates aggressively between looking so exhausted he might drop dead at any moment and so *pretty* that Billy wants to actually punch him in the face. He thinks about how Steve's weirdly good with the kids, even though he talks to them like he'd talk to Nancy and Jonathan and Billy himself instead of like the bratty thirteen-year-olds they are.

It's annoying. It's real fucking annoying.

And dangerous.

Steve had gotten to the arcade first this time.

A rarity in itself seeing as Billy was always there first. Always grabbed Max and shot over to the arcade so he had time to just... be by himself. Or, now, be with Harrington.

Once in a while Steve would show up at the same time, even rarer would Steve arrive before him. That only ever really happened when Max was running late, or Billy had to stay after school for one reason or another. So, the sight of Steve Harrington's ugly car sitting in the lot, empty of nerds, on a regular afternoon was odd.

Billy pushed the thought away as he pulled up to the bustling arcade and parked in his usual spot near Harrington's expensive car. Max, who had said nothing the entire ride over, darted out of the car quickly to catch up with her weird friends without so much as a glare in his direction.

Things were progressing slowly with Max since he had apologized to Harrington and made her tell him what she knew about the bullshit going on below Hawkins. It wasn't as silent as it had been since November, but they weren't actually fighting again either.

While things before had been quiet, they had also been filled with a static sort of rage that palpitated in the air between them. Max thought she was right, Max thought she had finally put him in his place, Max had thought she'd won. Billy just hadn't had it in him to fight with her about it, not when he had been tearing himself up inside while watching Steve's face change colors and his eyes go dead.

Because Billy had never felt more like his father than after that night. And that had been a really hard pill to swallow.

See, the thing was, Billy fought people all the time. It wasn't new.

He'd been the type of trouble making kid that teachers called home about ever since he was little. Playground scuffles, hallway brawls, even shit in the streets outside of school. He'd always been too aggressive, too mean. The school shrink had told him in eighth grade that it was because of the trauma he suffered at home.

Trauma she had called it.

Billy hadn't really thought what went on at home was all that *traumatic*. It sucked and he was uncomfortable and angry and wanted nothing more than to run away, but to call it *trauma* had just felt dramatic. Like one of those daytime Soaps that Susan liked so much. Like he wasn't *man enough* to deal with it, or something.

But the school psychologist had just looked at him in a way that evoked sadness without her expression ever really changing every time she got Billy to open his mouth. Billy had thought it was an impressive feat at the time, the fact that she was able to emote like that. Her face honestly fell when he'd said it out loud.

So, according to her, Billy was had *trauma* that stemmed from Neil's abuse and from his mother leaving him behind. She had told him that was why he had trouble *connecting to others*, why he started fights and had a tendency to be cruel. Why it was hard for him to express how he actually felt.

Billy stopped going after that.

He hadn't wanted to listen to her tell him that he was a bad person – even if the reason why was because of his father. He couldn't listen to another person tell him he was worthless.

The teachers had tried to get him to go back, even going as far as to call his dad about it. Neil had heard *insubordinate* and came right down to the school, no questions asked. Neil had heard *school psychologist* and took Billy home.

Neil had prodded him about what he'd told her, about what Billy had said. Billy had lied and told him that him and the kid he'd gotten into a fight with had been sent there to work out their problems. Neil had called it a *crook of pussy bullshit* and told Billy he wasn't going back, then bought him tacos from his favorite spot and told Billy he'd done a good job sticking up for himself.

Things with his dad were sometimes complicated.

He couldn't help but remember Mrs. Stanley's words whenever he thought that – *that's how abusers operate, William. They'll manipulate you into keeping their secrets.*

Sometimes that gave him comfort, because he'd never been able to manipulate Max into doing anything. Couldn't even get her to keep his biggest secret to herself. He hoped that meant that he wasn't like Neil.

Not yet anyway. A voice that sounded suspiciously like his old school shrink whispered in his head.

And that was why that fight with Steve had scared him so much. Why he had felt like he *had* to apologize to Steve.

He couldn't be like Neil. He *didn't want* to be like him.

He hoped Max understood that. He thought maybe she might, considering that the silence between them now was much more bearable than it had been.

But, there was only so much he could do at one time.

Baby steps.

Billy got out of his car and reached for his smokes, ready to light one up when he saw Steve wave him over. Which was odd. This was an actual detour from their carefully cultivated routine.

He sauntered over and couldn't help himself as he leaned into the open driver's side window, smirking. It's what he'd do with a chick, the exact same way he'd try and charm someone into letting him in. He should reign it in, he didn't want to scare Harrington off after all, didn't want him to over-think all of Billy's lingering glances or excessive use of *pretty boy*. But Steve didn't seem put off by the

display at all, just smirked back and raised a brow.

“Get in.” He jerked his head to the passenger’s seat and Billy couldn’t help the way his stomach coiled and his dick jumped.

Billy hauled himself up and got into Steve’s fancy car. It still smelled like him, all fresh and clean and *strong*. Fuck, he had such a potent scent for a Beta. It made Billy want to strip and rub himself all over the seat. Made him want to climb right into Steve’s lap and fuck himself down on the thick cock Steve tried to hide, bury his nose in that warm neck, hands fisted in that hair.

He pushed away those thoughts immediately as they came. He would absolutely not be doing any of those things. He was annoyed at himself for even thinking them.

He didn’t like Steve Harrington. He didn’t want to fuck Steve Harrington. Maybe if he screamed it loud enough, it’d actually be true.

Steve put his car in reverse the moment Billy was seated and drove out of the lot. Well, this was new. They had never done this before.

Billy said nothing as Steve drove down main street, just smoked his cigarette and looked out the window. The radio changed and Billy groaned, reaching forward without thinking and changing the station.

“Hey!” Steve pouted and Billy wanted to *bite* that lower lip. “I liked

that song.”

“Shut up.” Billy replied playfully. “If you’re kidnapping me, the least you could do is not make me listen to garbage.”

“Oh, come on. *Take On Me* is a good song and you know it!” Steve shot back, a smile lurking in the corners of his lips.

“I’m not listening to *a-ha* Steve. I just can’t do it.”

Steve rolled his eyes but let the smile break out of his lips as he shook his head. “You are so fucking annoying, you know that?”

Billy smiled lasciviously, tongue licking over his lower lip in the way he knew drove girls crazy. He wondered if it worked on Steve too. “Tell me something I don’t know, pretty boy.”

The song changed and Billy leaned over to turn the volume up, nice and loud, just how he liked it. Steve looked over at him with furrowed brows and a confused smile, he looked at Billy like he didn’t know him at all.

“*Blondie*? Seriously?”

“What?” Billy shrugged casually, but defensively. It was then he realized that he was sort of giving Steve something he hadn’t meant to. Showing him a piece of himself that others didn’t get to see.

Because, Billy was realizing, no one in Hawkins actually knew anything about him. “*Blondie* fucks.”

Steve shook his head, eyes looking between Billy and the road. “Yeah, it does.”

Then, Steve reached over and turned the dial up even more and Billy smiled wide.

They end up at some fucking cliff over-looking the lake below. It’s a steep drop, but the view is fucking spectacular. Billy gets out as soon as Steve parks to just – look at it.

“Where the fuck are we?”

Steve appears beside him, hands shoved deep into his pockets in the way that makes Billy want to stare at the large fucking bulge in his jeans. “The quarry.”

“Seems like a place you'd bring someone to make out.”

Why the fuck was he like this?

But Steve just nodded, seemingly not affected by Billy’s blunder, didn’t think of it as a come on. It wasn’t – it kind of was.

“Yeah, people do. It’s sort of a *Lover’s Lane* type place, but we used to just come up here to get fucked up too.” Steve shrugged, hands still in his pockets, eyes still searching the horizon. “I used to come here with Tommy and Carol a lot, or the guys from the team.”

Billy eyed him, but mirrored his position, sticking his hands into his jacket pockets, ignoring the way the cold stung his nose and fingers. “You telling me that you’ve never brought a girl here, Harrington?” Billy said it with a smirking tone, but felt his heart begin to rabbit in his chest. “Or an Omega.”

Steve blushed and Billy wanted to lick the heat from his skin. “I never said that.” He laughed, pulling a hand from his pocket to run through his hair. “But, I just mean... this is where I used to come with my friends. I haven’t actually been here in a while.”

The *because I no longer have any friends* was left unsaid. But Billy heard it anyway.

“Since you got dethroned?”

Billy leaned back against the grill of Steve’s car, the hot engine warming his ass through the denim. It was too hot to sit on the hood outright, but it was enough to keep him from freezing to death on the side of a cliff with Steve fucking Harrington.

“Yeah.” Steve sounded small and Billy didn’t like it.

“Fuck ‘em.” Billy spit as he lit up another cigarette and passed it to Steve.

Steve took it and smiled. He leaned back against the grill beside Billy and took a deep pull before handing the smoke back to him.

It was nice, sitting out in the open air with Steve, just the two of them. Hawkins was actually sort of pretty from this far up, the sun beginning its dip in the distance. They’d have to get back soon, because Max had an early curfew on school nights unless otherwise specified, but Billy let himself be in the moment with the pretty boy beside him.

He could get used to this. He shouldn't, but he could. He really fucking could.

4. Chapter 4

Just as Spring starts settling over Hawkins, basketball is over.

They were one game away from qualifying for State, and then they were done. Lost in the last quarter due to some really aggressive Alphas on the opposing team that almost put Billy to shame and basically wiped the floor with them. It was a good game, a *real* game, an actual challenge for a change.

Coach tells them not to be too upset about it – apparently it's the farthest they'd gotten to qualifying in five years. Billy knows that it's because of him that they even made it as far as they had and tried not to smirk too cockily over at where Steve stood next to him. Steve just rolled his eyes and ignored Billy's playful jeers.

That was something they did now – look at each other and know what the other was thinking.

It's weird to sort of have a friend.

Billy concedes that they're actually friends now.

Because Harrington keeps buying him food and driving around with him while the kids are at the arcade and calls Billy for help with homework. They're friends. It's weird.

But only because Billy likes it so much.

Tommy's been super pissy throughout the end of the basketball season. Glares whenever Steve and Billy fuck around during practice together, takes cheap shots when the coach isn't looking, frowns then they do things like react without words. He's pissed that Billy had all but abandoned him for Steve, and Billy gets that. Doesn't fucking care, but gets it.

Because Billy had heard all about Tommy's beef with Steve back in October when he first moved here. Tommy had been more than happy to answer Billy's questions about *how things worked around here, amigo*. Filled him in on his entire history with the former King Steve 'The Hair' Harrington and how he'd fallen from grace.

Privately, Billy thinks that Tommy is still sore that Steve doesn't want him anymore. That Steve found someone else. That it's *Billy*. Must eat him up inside, Billy's sure.

After the game, on the bus ride home, Tommy lumbers over to them and makes Billy get up from his seat so that he could sit with Steve and *talk*. Billy had aggressively rolled his eyes but pushed himself from the little bench, annoyed that he had to leave Steve's scent and the warm press of their sweaty sides. But he did it, because he's honestly *exhausted* by Tommy's incessant pouting and he hoped that maybe this would make it stop.

Billy watches Tommy and Steve have a long talk on the ride home. It's mostly talking, but Billy can hear growling and sighing and angry whispers. Why they had to hash this all out on the drive back from their failed away game and the end of their season was beyond Billy.

When they finally made it back to Hawkins, Billy waited by the beamer, smoking a cigarette, glaring at the two of them hashing it out across the parking lot. He reeks – but only of sweat, thank god – and watches as Steve nodded at whatever Tommy was saying. Eventually, their talk comes to a close and Tommy pulled Steve in for a hug. Billy felt his jaw clench.

There was nothing to that hug. It looked grossly platonic – slaps on the back and a little side-sway. But Billy still couldn't help himself from getting a little territorial. A little *jealous*. Which was ridiculous, because Harrington was just his sort-of-friend. Billy had no claim over who he touched or didn't. And he didn't want to – or so he kept trying to tell himself.

Eventually, Steve broke out of Tommy's embrace and trotted over to where Billy was waiting by his car. Leaned back against the cool metal him and took the cigarette from Billy's fingers, bringing it to his mouth, taking a deep drag. Billy tried not to let his scent get too cloying at the sight of Steve's mouth wrapped around his smoke the way it was. Harrington should come with a fucking warning label.

“How'd that go.”

Steve shrugged, handing the cigarette back. “I don't know.” He sighed, running a hand over his tired eyes, though his floppy, sweat-soaked hair. Billy wanted to bundle him up and lay on top of him. “Fine? I guess. I think we're okay now.”

“Yeah?” Billy asked around a lung full of smoke.

“Yeah.” Steve leaned back beside him, their shoulders and arms fully touching. “I mean, we were best friends for a really long time. Like, kindergarten-and-little-league-long-time.” Billy whistled dramatically and it pulled a small smile out of Steve, which is what he’d been aiming for. “We stopped being friends because I didn’t want to be an asshole to the people I cared about anymore, and Tommy didn’t know how to handle that.”

“Handled it by turning everyone against you, is what it seems like.” Billy said with a little bit of an attitude.

“You’re not wrong.” Steve conceded. “But... I don’t know, man. I’m just tired of fighting with him all the time. If he wants to be friends again, fine. That’s fine.”

“If you say so, pretty boy.” Billy replied, trying to keep his voice void of the skepticism that lingered. He wanted to be supportive of Steve, he was *trying* these days.

Steve turned his head to look at Billy, dark eyes pinning Billy to the spot. Billy couldn’t read the look in his eyes but, *fuck*, he wanted to. He was desperate to understand what was going on in Harrington’s head, to decipher what those *looks* could possibly mean.

“I have other friends now.” Steve shrugged. It was casual, deceptively so. But Billy could see the playfulness lingering about Steve’s lips.

Billy took a deep drag and literally had to tear his gaze away from

Steve's mouth. "What – you want a fucking medal or something?"

Steve snorted and pushed his shoulder into Billy's as he laughed. "Fuck off." He shook his head, hands worming their way into the pouch of his hoodie, dark eyes gazing up at the stars – it was the most relaxed Billy had seen Steve look in the five months he'd been here. He tried not to let it go to his head that it was because of him. "God, why am I even friends with you?"

Billy shrugged easily – casually, deceptively – shoulder rubbing against Steve's as he did. "Beats me, Harrington. Must've given you brain damage or something."

And Steve laughed – like actually laughed. Loud and dorky-looking, head tossed back, smile stretched across his lips. Billy couldn't stop himself from smiling back, couldn't curb it if he tried.

"Must have." Steve said finally, a smile in his voice, and eyes, and across his mouth.

He let his head rest on his shoulder as he looked at Billy, eyes soft, body relaxed, scent gentle around them. Billy felt his heart rabbit in his chest. Felt his pupils dilate a little at Steve's blooming scent – still fresh and clean and soft but so, *sogood*. Billy couldn't help but just... stare back at him. At this stupid, pretty boy.

He had beaten that face in. Put bruises on that pale skin. Watched as blood smeared over it.

He had put Steve on his back, thrown his body over Steve's, held him to the ground. He had ruined Steve Harrington.

Billy shouldn't get to have this.

He shouldn't have soft eyes and relaxed shoulders and a smile that made Billy want to drop to his knees. He shouldn't get to be Steve Harrington's friend.

But here he was. With Steve. Acting like he deserved it.

Billy didn't think he did, not really. But Steve seemed to. *Steve* seemed to think he was worth the effort. Steve had accepted his apology, had *moved on*, had told him about monsters.

Steve – who still sat with his ex-girlfriend at lunch. Steve – who forgave his ex-best friend because he'd asked for it. Steve – who had let not one, but two, guys who had roughed him up back into his life.

Billy did not understand Steve Harrington.

But *fuck* did he want to.

Baseball season starts up and the newly forgiven Tommy demands that they come to tryouts.

Apparently, Steve was an all-around school athlete – basketball, baseball, swimming, even track. Steve had done it all. Billy tried really hard not to think about him in his swim team speedo – he didn't actually try all that hard, if he was being honest.

Billy likes baseball. He's not as good at it as basketball, where he can be aggressive and quick on his feet, but he likes it well enough, is decent enough. So, he follows Steve and Tommy to the field after school and shows what he's got.

And Steve Harrington in baseball pants that go tight across his ass as he bends to pitch is not a factor in his decision, of course. Not at all.

They make the team, obviously, and spring is so much easier than fall had been. The cold began to recede, and flowers began to bloom, and the grass was very green and the air fresh. Different from California, so different, but... nice. Nicer than it had been when they first moved here in the middle of October. And Tommy had become less annoying now that Steve had decided to be his friend again; smiled all wide and sent stupid eyebrows at them from his position as catcher.

Tommy and Carol would sometimes sit with them at lunch – not often, because while Steve had forgiven Tommy and decided to move on, neither Jonathan or Nancy seemed to have the same resolve. It was weird not being the one they side-eyed at the lunch table. Weird to have them prefer his company to someone else's. Other times

Tommy would avoid the lunch table all together and just invite Steve and Billy to some party or to get high in his basement after school.

Most of the time, though, it was just Steve and Billy, drinking at the quarry or grabbing a burger in between carting the kids around. Easy, as it had become, casual, like it'd always been.

And then, Steve invited him over to his house to hangout while the kids played D&D.

Told him all casual-like while they leaned against the car outside of the arcade, sharing a cigarette since Steve really was trying to quit and didn't want to commit to a full one of his own. The kids had started a weekly ongoing game at one of their houses, and apparently now Steve's. Billy knew because Max begged to go the last couple of Fridays and Billy had been forced to drop her off at the Wheelers or the Byers houses – avoiding both of those Moms for two very different reasons.

Now the kids had somehow wrangled Steve into letting them use his big house for their stupid game. Steve was such a fucking pushover. But, apparently, so was Billy. Because how could he turn down that offer?

Not when Steve had looked at him so sweetly, lips wrapped around their shared cigarette, sun caught in that dark hair and making it gleam like a goddamn halo. Not when he was apparently Steve Harrington's fucking *friend*.

Plus, he wanted to see inside the Harrington Estate, as he'd taken to

calling it – a term Tommy had coined offhandedly and stuck in Billy's mind. He wanted to see how Steve lived, wanted to see where Steve slept. Wanted in on his world more than Billy already was. He wanted to know everything.

So, Friday he showed up at Harrington's big house with Max, with instructions from Neil to have her home by nine-thirty *the latest, Billy*. Which was fine. That was more than enough time to spend in Steve's presence, in his home.

"Don't embarrass me." Max growled as she knocked on the front door.

"Fuck off." Was all Billy could manage in return because Steve was opening the door and smiling at them.

Max shot through as soon as the door was open enough, pushing through under Steve's arm and rushing into the back room where Billy could hear the boys and the mysterious El. Steve turned to watch her go with a puzzled little smile on his face, which got wider when he turned back to Billy.

"Fucking gremlin." Billy shook his head, stepping forward to enter the house.

Steve was still standing in the doorway, hand on the open door, essentially trapping him on the front step. Billy had stepped in like Steve was going to move, but he didn't. He just stood his ground, looking down at Billy with lowered eyes and a private little smile, practically trapping Billy in his space. Fuck, did Steve smell good.

Billy raised a brow, looking at Steve from the slight height difference, more pronounced because of the door. "You gonna let me in, pretty boy, or are we just gonna stand out here all night?"

Steve stepped back and let Billy in. Billy tried not to shiver as his shoulders brushed along Steve's chest and arm as he passed. Steve's house was big, kind of ugly in that new-aged modern sort of way that had gotten popular in the last couple years. Billy wanted to head right up the staircase and faceplant in Steve's sheets, but, he wasn't that much of an uncultured pig so he sauntered on through, down the hallway until it opened up.

Steve followed him and moved past him into the kitchen, Billy could hear the kids being obnoxious in the living room. He whistled as he eyed Steve pulling out some beers from the fridge.

"Pretty nice place you got here, princess."

Steve tossed Billy a can, he caught it, cracked it open, and took a sip as he eyed Steve from the other side of the island counter. Steve shrugged, fiddling with the tab of his own beer. "I guess."

There were open bags of chips and pretzels strewn across the counter in a way that only spoke of greedy little goblins hands. He shook his head, moving forward to consolidate a bit of the mess, shoving some loose chips into his mouth as he did so.

"What – you don't like living in some big, fancy house?" Billy asked

absently as he rolled the chip bags closed so they didn't get stale.

Steve cracked the can and took a deep pull before placing it on the counter. Billy eyed him quietly from the other side, waiting for an answer. There it was again – that lingering sadness that frequently lurked around Steve's eyes and mouth.

“Don't love living in it alone a lot of the time.”

It was said with a shrug. Said casually, easily. Meant to be brushed off and discarded. Billy had a feeling that it wasn't often people dug deeper when it came to Steve Harrington.

“You have parents, I'm assuming.” Billy kept his tone light, sort of mean, sort of sarcastic – not wanting to spook Steve with his concern, with his curiosity.

Steve took another deep sip of beer and reached for the open bag of pretzels, taking a handful to munch on. More for something to do with his hands than to actually eat, or, at least, that's what Billy thought as he watched him. “Yeah, but they're never really here.” He shrugged again, like it was no big deal, but his eyes were saying otherwise. “My dad travels a lot for business and my mom goes with him because she doesn't trust him not to fuck his secretary. So.”

“And you don't like having the house to yourself?” Billy asks genuinely, leaning against the counter, bringing himself a little closer to Steve. Billy would *kill* to have the house to himself; would do some really crazy and illegal things to hardly ever have to be in Neil's presence.

Steve seemed to prickle at that, shoulders setting in a tight, defensive way that Billy had seen before, that Billy had been the *cause* of before. Clearly this was some type of sore subject for him. Billy wanted to walk around the counter and grab the back of his neck, sooth away that discomfort. He shook the thought away as soon as it came. Instead, he let his body stayed relaxed and open, showing Steve he wasn't trying to start a fight.

"No." Steve said, sighing and running a hand through his hair. "No. Not after Barb. Not when I... not when I know what's actually out there." And Billy hadn't actually thought about it like that, looking toward the living room where the wall was basically all glass and looking out toward the dark pool. "Not that I really liked it all that much before, but. Back then it was easy to just throw parties when my parents were gone for the week and full the silence with Tommy and Carol's yammering or whatever girl I could manage to trick into thinking I was cool."

Steve finished off his beer but played with the empty can, not really looking at Billy. He eyed Steve from across the shiny granite island counter littered with snack food that their little heathen children had left behind, watched the slight shake in his hands, the exhaustion in his downcast eyes. Obviously Harrington's parents weren't home right now, Billy wondered when was the last time Steve really slept? It wasn't hard to make the leap of Steve's tired stare and the empty house.

Billy stood from where he was leaning against the counter and chugged the rest of his beer. "You gonna show me the rest of this Estate, or what?"

Steve looked up, definitely not expecting that to be what Billy was going to say. Billy raised a brow and Steve rolled his eyes, some of the tension easing from his shoulders.

“Yeah, alright, Hargrove. Come on, I’ll give you the grand tour of *Casa de Harrington*.”

Billy snorted at Steve’s bad Spanish, the urge to show off and speak what he knew hit him hard suddenly. And, while Billy was used to showing off and boasting, it was usually just for surface level shit. He wasn’t used to wanting to show his secrets, show the things from California he kept close to the chest. It was an odd feeling.

In the end, he didn’t say anything, just followed Steve around as he showed Billy his house. He listened as Steve went on about wild ragers and intimate parties that the space had hosted, showed off his mother’s wild record collection and the giant tv in the living room and his father’s expensive liquor cabinet. Eventually they ended up in Steve’s room. Billy tried not to act like a fucking weirdo about it. They were friends, they were *guys*, not need to get all omega over it.

“That wallpaper is fucking *heinous*, Steve. Jesus.” Billy pulled a face as he stared at the plaid wallpaper, shaking his head.

Steve snorted as he sat down on his bed. “I didn’t pick it.”

“Yeah, I sure fucking hope not. Have to get your eyes checked if that had been the case.” Steve just rolled his eyes but said nothing as Billy wandered around his room and looked at his stuff.

It was pretty plain overall – a desk, a dresser, a framed photo of a hot car, a generously sized bed for their age. There was a mirror on his closet door that had some pictures stuck into the frame, otherwise the room was bare. Not trophies, no medals, no knickknacks from exes or Homecoming crowns or sashes, nothing that would really indicate that Steve Harrington lived here.

If it weren't for those pictures of Wheeler and Byers, the kids, and Tommy and Carol, stuck to the mirror or the messy desk littered with Steve's half-finished homework, Billy might not honestly believe it at all.

He moved away from the closet door – really the only point in the room with any personality – and came to sit down on the bed next to Steve. Billy let himself lean back against the headboard, feet crossed at the ankles – and tried not to pop his zipper at the scent or implication of laying on *Steve's* bed.

Steve wasn't an Alpha – as Billy often reminded himself – but the implication of letting someone else in his space, in his *bed*, wasn't lost on Billy. It implied *trust*. Billy honestly trembled a little at the thought.

"I get it." Billy said after a while, quietly, not looking at Steve. "I mean, I *don't* – I would literally kill to live basically alone – but... I get what you're saying. As much as I can."

Steve's shoulder pressed into Billy's as he sighed, running a hand through his hair. They didn't look at each other, and Billy tried really hard not to turn his head and bury his face in Steve's neck or pillows.

He just sat where he was, pressed against Steve's side and let himself relax a little.

He didn't really smell like an Omega with the suppressants and the blockers. Honestly, Billy was pretty sure he didn't smell much like anything but aggression most of the time. Which was probably why the Alpha lie was so easy to sell in a town like this – people saw what they wanted to see.

But he knew that while he didn't smell much like an Omega, that his scent was generally pretty pleasant and was actually soothing if he allowed it to be. It wasn't often, really the last time he'd let it happen had been with Max, back in California, before everything went to shit.

Billy let it happen now. Let his scent pump out *calm* and *safe* and *relax*. Mostly because he wanted to see if he was still capable of it, but really because he wanted Steve to chill the fuck out.

Steve seemed to literally sink into him, his shoulders losing their tension and his eyes blinking slowly like he might actually fall asleep. Which, was the intention. Billy did *not* like the look of those bags under his eyes.

Nancy had told him off-handedly the other day, while Steve and Jonathan were over on the line to get hot lunch, that Steve had trouble sleeping since everything. That he had *nightmares* and used to prowl around with that fucking murder-bat looking for monsters in the middle of the night. That it was worse when his parents were out of town and he was alone in his house. Billy hadn't been sure he believed her at the time, but one look at Steve right now confirmed that Nancy had been telling the truth.

If his fucking scent was making Steve blink all heavily and tilt the way he was, then Steve must be more exhausted than Billy had thought.

“Just fucking close your eyes, pretty boy.” Billy said gruffly, pressing his shoulder more comfortably against Steve’s.

“M’not tired.”

“You’re a fucking liar, is what you are.”

Steve snorted but eventually closed his eyes. His breathing evened out quickly, his head falling to lean on Billy’s shoulder. It was a little warm, and Billy was rock hard in his too tight jeans, but he could hear the kids shouting happily downstairs, and he could smell Steve so perfectly pressed this close to him while in his goddamn bed, and –

Billy felt *safe*.

He felt *happy*.

Goddammit.

5. Chapter 5

Billy's heat is due soon.

Spring was now in full force, the baseball season basically over, the school year also beginning to dwindle down into the final quarter. Everyone itching for a break, for sunshine and ice cream and three months away from Hawkins high.

Summer was so close that Billy could practically *taste* it. He ached for it. Ached for the humid air and harsh sunshine and longer days. But the warmer weather and blooming flowers also meant an oncoming heat.

And that was something that Billy really just did *not* want to deal with. At all, really, but especially now.

But it was mandatory to have scheduled heats so many times a year while on suppressants. Medically mandatory the doctor in California had firmly told his dad back when Billy had presented. They pushed it as far as they could – the only thing him and Neil were really ever in agreement on was their dislike of his heats. It was also the only time Neil stayed off his back.

Billy should like them – because Neil was slightly less awful during that week, because it was a whole week off from school, because maybe they'd be enjoyable if he had an Alpha or *someone* to help him through. But Billy was hellbent on keeping that secret while in Hawkins, so, they sucked.

Overwarm and sweating through bedsheets that felt like sandpaper on his skin, chugging down pitchers of water, and riding his fingers until his wrist was sore and cramped. The aching desperateness to be filled, to be soothed, to be cared for. Yeah, Billy fucking hated them.

The only person who didn't seem to detest them was Susan. As a mature Omega, she got it, she understood, and she did what she could to make sure Billy was cared for during that week. Susan would bring him rolled up lunch meat and cheese, watching carefully from the door as he ate. She refilled his water and would leave him wet washcloths. Billy felt like it was the only time he was nice to her, the only time he actually wanted her around.

Neil would clear out of the house as much as he could. Let Max stay out longer with her brat squad, would take her out for ice cream or a burger. His dad liked Max. Treated her like the daughter he'd never gotten – better, even, because she wasn't actually his kid. He needed to impress Susan in a way he never had to impress Billy's mom.

Because Billy was a disappointment. Always had been. And it had been his mother's fault, apparently.

Max was his fresh start.

He wondered if his dad could tell Max might be an Alpha the same way Billy could. Maybe that was why he let Max get away with so much shit.

Billy could also tell that his heat was steadily approaching just based off the way he reacted to Steve.

The urge to scent him was powerful. Like a real, tangible thing that he had to reign in and control.

Billy felt his eyes sort of glaze over when they were in close proximity, felt his cock plump up too quickly if Steve so much as smiled softly at him or glared at him playfully from across the hall. Billy had to physically separate himself while they were in the showers, because the desperate *ache* to stare at or touch Steve's wet, toned body was just too much. Billy honestly could not be in close quarters with Steve's thick fucking cock right now if he didn't want to be arrested for both assault and public indecency. Fuck - he wanted to whimper and whine and curl into Steve's neck, lick across his gland, across his skin, kiss every fucking dark freckle he could find. He wanted to choke on that cock and ride him into the mattress. He wanted Steve to fucking *knot* him so badly -

Billy shook that thought from his mind, cheeks a little warm, eyes blinking down at the notebook in front of him. Steve wasn't an Alpha, there would be no knotting of any kind. It was just the stupid preheat talking.

So, Billy had tried to stay away from Steve as best he could in the past couple of days. Last thing he needed was to look like a fucking idiot in front of Steve, or Jon and Nancy, or the stupid rugrats, before going into his heat. He didn't need anyone to put two-and-two together and exposing his designation. He had one more year left in this hellhole and then he could leave Hawkins, leave *Neil*, and do whatever the fuck he wanted. Last thing he needed was someone getting wise and ruining his last year here.

But staying away from Steve was proving harder than he had first

anticipated. And not just because all Billy wanted to do was wrap himself around Steve, either.

No, *Steve* was the one who seemed to be having a hard time staying away.

Of course, Billy hadn't really told him *why*, but Steve had noticed almost immediately that Billy wasn't around. He had pestered both Nancy and Jonathan about it, asking if Billy was in any of their shared classes, asking why he hadn't been at lunch or at the arcade. He had even asked Max where Billy had gone, and why she had skateboarded home the other day.

Max, for her part, actually managed to keep her big fucking mouth shut and didn't give Steve much to go on. Max could be a vicious little bitch when she wanted to be, Billy would know, but at least this time it leaned in his favor.

She appeared in the doorway of his room, standing with arms crossed over her chest, staring him down. "Steve thinks you're mad at him and he won't shut up about it."

Billy, who was sitting at his desk, attempting to do homework and not think about Steve or his big dick, just mirrored Max and crossed his own arms, face giving nothing away. "So."

Max's brows furrowed and her lips pulled down into an angry pout that Billy used to find cute when she was younger. Now he just found it annoying. "So," She mimicked snottily. "Are you mad at him?"

“No.” Billy said easily, looking away from Max and back down at his notebook.

“Okay, so then why are you being so weird?”

Billy growled and snapped back at her. “Because I’m about to go into fucking heat, Maxine.” He glared at her, voice raising in a way that he could only get away with because their parents weren’t home. “Excuse me for not wanting to be fucking swarmed by all of you before that.”

Max rolled her eyes so aggressively that Billy was both impressed and worried for her health. “Oh my god, can you just call him and tell him that you’re not actually mad at him, then? I can’t take his sad eyes anymore. It’s annoying.”

“Get the fuck out of my room.” He growled.

Max glared at him and then slammed his door closed. Billy sighed, rubbing a hand over his face. He didn’t want Steve sad or upset – that was literally the last thing he wanted. If it had been a week ago, a month ago, he would’ve just ignored it and saw Steve tomorrow and acted like nothing happened. But so close to his heat, Billy couldn’t help the prickling anxiety at the thought of Steve upset with him.

So, Billy grabbed the phone from beside his bed and dialed Steve’s number.

A *woman* answered.

“Hello?”

“Uh,” Billy blinked, confused for a moment, thinking that maybe he had dialed the wrong number before realizing that his was probably Steve’s *mom*. “Hi. Is Steve around?”

“Sure,” She said pleasantly. “Hold on a moment, will you?”

The line went silent as he was put on hold and a minute later Steve answered with the hint of a sigh. “Hello?”

“Harrington.” Billy bit at his lip.

This felt weirder than it should. Maybe because Steve’s parents were home, maybe because Billy had been avoiding him the last few days, maybe because all he could think about was the way his dick began to fill out against his thigh just from the sound of Steve’s voice.

“Billy?” Steve breathed out. “Hey, are you alright?”

“Yeah, man. I’m fine.” Billy bit out, managing to sound a little annoyed at Steve’s worried tone.

Max hadn't been kidding, huh?

"Oh." Steve's tone dropped out a little and Billy *literally* had to hold back a whine at the disappointment he could basically taste on Steve's words. "Okay. That's good. I just... I haven't really seen you the last couple days. I wasn't sure –"

And Steve had definitely wanted to say something but had cut himself off. Billy felt the bottom of his stomach drop out, because he knew that Steve had been about to say. Knew why Steve had been worried. It was all wrapped up in the *things they didn't talk about, ever* but Billy knew.

"I'm just sick, man. No need to worry that pretty boy head of yours."

"Okay. Yeah, okay." Steve was nodding to himself; Billy was sure of it. Probably running a wide hand through that perfect hair and pushing away whatever anxiety surrounding Billy that had been plaguing him. "Think you'll come to D&D tomorrow?"

There was a hopeful lilt to Steve's tone and – he shouldn't, he *really* shouldn't. Not this close to his heat. Not when he knew that it'd take everything in him to keep himself from wrapping himself around Steve.

But Steve was *worried* and thought Billy was *mad* at him. The blockers would keep his scent from blooming even without the suppressants running through his body, no one would know if he just

kept himself normal and in control.

“Yeah.” He sighed a little. “I’ll come.”

“Good.” Billy could hear the smile in Steve’s voice, the relief.

“But if you get sick, I don’t want to hear you complaining – you got me, Harrington?”

It’d be a lie easy enough to sell – being sick. He looked sick. Or strung out, more like. But it wouldn’t be that hard to convince everyone, especially when he wasn’t in school next week.

“Promise, Hargrove.” Steve smirked and Billy couldn’t help but smile at the sound of it.

“So,” Billy started. “Your mom?”

Steve sighed and Billy could hear him rustling about, probably getting comfortable on the bed. Billy followed suit, imagining what he would look like spread out on that ugly bedspread, phone pressed to his ear, hair a wild, dark halo on the pillow beneath him.

“Yeah.” Steve let out a breath through his nose. “They got back on Sunday and they’re leaving again tomorrow.”

Home for a week and the off again. Billy could read the emptiness in Steve's voice which meant he had more feelings on the subject than he'd like. Steve wasn't a sharer, not about emotional stuff. Billy could relate.

But, where Billy was a deeply emotional person who tried really hard not to be, Steve was a burier. He covered himself in bravery and a smile and just... didn't think about the shit that bothered him. Pushed it aside and thought about the next thing. It fascinated Billy how quickly Steve seemed to rebound, how much he kept bottled up, how much he liked to play pretend.

"Have you slept better, at least?"

Steve was quiet for a moment and Billy wanted so desperately to be curled up on that bed with him. "I guess."

"Good." Billy rumbled.

Neither of them said anything for a while, just listened to the staticky breathing over the line. Billy could picture him so perfectly on that ugly bedspread – phone in hand, head resting back against the matching pillowcase, hand trailing down to thumb at the button of his too-tight jeans, tracing over the obscene bulge that Billy often struggled to keep his gaze from, lowering the zip, wide hand reaching in to pull out the massive cock Steve tried to hide –

A car door slammed shut and Billy jolted.

Hand gripping his *aching* dick through his jeans, inner thighs a little slick, breath caught in his chest. Billy cleared his throat.

“I’ve gotta run, pretty boy.”

“Okay.” Steve said quietly, voice a little lower than before. “I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Yeah.” Billy bit at his lip. “I’ll be there.”

Billy wakes up the next morning and feels okay. Preheat symptoms no worse than they had been the day before, thank god.

It’s Saturday, so Susan and Neil are out running errands for most of the day. Which leaves the house to him and Max for a little while. It’s nice when their parents aren’t home, when Susan isn’t nervously fluttering about like a startled bird and Neil isn’t silently watching him from the living room. It’s easier to breathe when it’s just the two of them.

Max is sitting on her bed, blasting music and working on the wheels of her skateboard. A walkie-talkie is on the bed next to her and every once in a while, she’ll hold it up to her ear and yell something back.

Billy works out for most of the morning.

His equipment, for the most part, lives in the front of the house. Neil doesn't care that Billy's shit takes up part of the room because he likes that Billy is strong. Or appears to be strong, anyway. He likes that Billy looks like an Alpha, like a man, even though he isn't one. Because Billy's not an Alpha and Neil doesn't think he'll ever be man enough.

He works up a real sweat, pushes himself to get rid of the tension and pent-up energy he always has before a heat. It's made worse by the thoughts of Steve, and the literal ache he feels to be near him. Going tonight will probably be a bad idea, but being this close to his heat, that omega part of him won't let him *not* go. Not after hearing Steve's voice last night, not after knowing Steve had been upset with him.

No, he'd go. He would just aggressively work out for most of the day and then get off a couple of times before they left.

Billy had sweat through his tank-top, arms sort of straining, breathing a little ragged. He put the weights down and took a moment to cool off. Max had moved on from her skateboard to the comic in her hand, the phone was now attached to her ear instead of the walkie-talkie, the music still blaring.

Billy moved to the shower while she was busy ignoring him.

He let the warm water wash away the sweat and the heady smell

clinging to his skin. He wouldn't smell like heat because of the blockers, but he still smelt... potent. He washed his hair and let the water run a little colder, it felt good on his heated skin.

His cock was heavy, jutting proudly up toward his belly. Billy rested his head against the cool tiles as he brushed his fingers over the swollen head. Max's music was loud, she wouldn't hear the groan he let out. Billy allowed himself a firm grip, a desperate squeeze, before moving on.

He let go of his cock and moved his fingers to his hole, pressing in. He let out a small gasp at the feeling, at the way his fingers slid right in, wet and slick, at how tender he felt this close to his heat.

Billy thought about Steve as he slid his fingers in, in, *in*, reaching and searching, fucking himself open with a shoulder pressed against the tile wall, cool water running over him. Fuck, he wished Steve was behind him, that it was Steve's fingers fucking Billy open, getting him ready for that massive dick. Billy would be split open wide by that cock and he'd love every fucking second of it.

He moved his free hand down to grip his aching dick, maneuvering slightly so he could do both at the same time. It was a bit difficult in this position, but Billy was shaking with the need for release, soft whines falling from his throat.

Eventually, he fixed the position and started fucking into his fist and back onto his fingers. It wasn't enough, it was never enough, but Billy had gotten good at getting off, at making do with what he had. A hard press in with three fingers at the right angle and Billy was done, shooting against the shower wall with a moan, clenching *tight* around his own hand, wishing desperately that it was something wider.

He bit back the urge to moan Steve's name.

There wouldn't be coming back from that, so Billy kept a lid tight over that particular want.

He panted against the shower wall and let the water wash away the slick and come from his skin. He'd have to get off a couple more times to make sure he didn't fucking pop his zipper or leak in front of Harrington and the goblins. He gave himself a minute to catch his breath before going again.

Max is adamant that they arrive earlier than the others. Apparently, it was her turn to DM, or something, and she was meeting Mike there before everyone else to prepare.

Billy didn't really care when they went, as long as he got to spend some time alone with Harrington without the goblin squad stealing his attention away. So, they fled to Loch Nora and Billy wondered if he'd actually get to catch a glimpse of Steve's parents. Steve hadn't said what time they were actually leaving today, maybe they'd still be there. Billy had a brief thought that maybe they should've called ahead or something, given Harrington time to prepare if his parents actually were home.

But when they pulled up, only Steve's car was in the drive and the Wheeler's van parked on the street.

Max literally bounded up to the house, not even bothering to knock – the fucking heathen. Billy shook his head as he closed Harrington's front door behind him and moved further into the house. He found Max and Mike in the kitchen, but no Harrington.

Mike was telling Max something quietly by the kitchen counter, a can of soda and a pile of books in front of him. Max had the furrow to her brow that said she was worried. Billy moved passed them without asking what it was. Wheeler must still be here if the van was out front, and she must be with Steve if they had left Mike alone in the kitchen.

So Billy moved passed them and poked his head into the empty living room, eyes scanning the downstairs guestroom, before moving quietly upstairs. He felt like he was slinking around – he wasn't, Steve had brought him upstairs before, but it was quiet, and Mike had looked weirded out, and it gave Billy a bad feeling in his gut.

He heard the noises as he stepped off the landing and made his way toward Steve's room. The door was half closed, like maybe Nancy had come looking for him the same way Billy had and just sort of moved the door behind her without really shutting it closed. Billy peeked his head in, already knowing the noises were panicked and sad and coming from Steve.

Steve was on the floor, facing the door, back pressed against the side of the bed. Nancy was kneeling beside him, murmuring low, a hand rubbing across the back of his shoulders soothingly. Steve had the heels of his palms pressed against his eyes, his breathing panicked

and coming out too fast.

Nancy looked up sharply as Billy pushed the door open a little more and stepped in. Her gaze was hard, ready to fight if necessary. She didn't stop her hand from rubbing over Steve's back.

"Billy, now's not the best time." She said firmly, daring him to be an asshole right now.

Steve gave a little hiccup but didn't remove the hands from his eyes.

Billy felt his chest sort of crack open at the sight. He shut the door behind him fully, stepping over to where they sat, ignoring Nancy's sharp stare. He dropped gently to the floor in front of Steve, instincts literally going crazy with the urge to comfort, and placed his palms gently on Steve's raised knees. He pushed out *calm* through his scent and hoped it was working.

"Steve." He said softly, so much more softly than he'd ever spoken to Harrington before, softer than he'd spoken to anyone in a long time. "Hey, I need you to give me your hands, okay?"

Steve didn't respond and his breathing was still too fast for Billy's liking, a sort of hyperventilating that was painful, his cheeks and neck flushed from the lack of oxygen and the stress of whatever triggered his anxiety spiral.

Billy tried again, palms rubbing soothingly over Steve's knees. "Steve,

give me your hands.” He ignored Nancy staring at him like he’d grown a second head, like she didn’t trust whatever it was he was trying to do, pretended she wasn’t there to witness him being gentle. “Come on, pretty boy. Give me your hands.”

It took him a minute, but slowly Steve pulled his shaking hands from his eyes and placed them in Billy’s waiting palms. His face was beet-red, eyes bloodshot and glassy, but he wasn’t crying. Steve didn’t seem to be a crier like Billy, but maybe that was what triggered this – his attempt to keep it all inside. Billy didn’t know shit about anything, not really, but he knew how to help Steve get through this at least.

“That’s good.” Billy held eye contact with him, ignoring the way his heart started beating at just essentially holding Steve’s hands, ignoring the desperate *need* bubbling up that wanted to cover Steve’s body with his own, and started squeezing each finger of Steve’s left hand slowly and purposefully. “When I squeeze your thumb, we’re going to take a deep breath in through our mouth and let it out through our nose, okay? Then when I get to the thumb of your other hand, we’ll do it again, okay?”

Steve nodded a little frantically, his breath a wheezing sort of rattle that sounded painful. Billy squeezed Steve’s thumb and slowly took a deep breath in, watching as Steve was only able to take in a little, and then blowing it out through his nose. He kept eye contact and began with the pinky of Steve’s right hand and made his way to the thumb before breathing in deep again and then letting it out.

They went on just like that for a little while, until Steve was able to take in enough air to sort of match Billy. Only then did Billy nod and add in the next step. “Steve, I want you to squeeze my fingers now. The same rhythm, pinky to thumb, and then we breathe. Okay?”

Steve nodded, his eyes having lost that frantic sheen. He now just looked exhausted. But he complied with Billy's request, shaky hands squeezing Billy's fingers and breathing deep. Billy kept eye contact, put his entire focus solely on Steve, and kept pushing out calming through his scent and ignoring the urge to burrow in close and stroke gentle fingers through Steve's hair.

Eventually, Steve's breathing returned to almost normal, and his scent wasn't spiking with *anxiety sadness anger* anymore. He looked away from Billy first, bringing his eyes down to their hands. Embarrassed, Billy realized.

It was then that Billy finally shot a look at Nancy – who was seated on the floor, openly staring at the two of them. There was something like respect on her face, something like gratitude in her eyes.

“We’re okay.” Billy rumbled out, thumbs swiping over Steve’s wrists – over his *scent glands* Billy realized belatedly.

Steve looked back up at him, eyes still a little glassy and face still red, but he was alright. Billy could tell he was alright. Then Steve shot a look at Nancy and Billy couldn't really read that quick interaction as well. Didn't know what that shared look meant in the slightest. He pushed away the dip of jealousy at the sight of it.

“Wanna tell me what happened?” Billy asked lightly, breaking the look between Steve and Nancy. “Is it... the Hawkins underground?”

Steve gave a huffy little laugh that was over as soon as it started. He shook his head, eyes focused on where Billy was still essentially holding his hands, thumbs rubbing over his wrists. "No. Nothing like that." His voice was quiet and raw, he glanced to Nancy again.

Nancy looked between the two of them before getting up from the floor, "I'll be downstairs."

Once she was gone, Billy reluctantly let go of Steve's hands and moved to sit next to him instead of in front of him. Shoulder to shoulder, thigh to thigh. He figured it might be easier for Steve to talk to him if Billy wasn't staring at him in the eye. It was also giving into the gnawing urge to burrow into Steve's side, at least a little. Billy felt settled as soon as their sides touched.

They were quiet for a while, just sitting next to each other, Steve still breathing slowly and deeply beside him. His hands, empty now without Billy holding them, were rubbing across his denim covered knees. When he finally spoke, Steve's voice wobbled a little.

"The last of my acceptance letters came today."

"For college?" Billy asked, confused and a little sour at the thought of Steve leaving next year. He tried to reel it in and keep his scent calm and even. It was getting harder the longer he sat here. Billy moved a hand up to wipe his brow.

"Yeah." Steve sighed, lifting a hand to run across his eyes and then through his hair. "I didn't get in. To any of them."

Billy turned his head to look at him, eyes tracing over the exhaustion and defeat lining his face and body. "That sucks, man."

Steve huffed out a small laugh again, it sounded painful to Billy's ears. "Yeah, it does. Especially since my dad has been on my case about it, and of course he's home when *this* letter comes." He looks distant, hands shaking a little. "They think I'm a disappointment. That I don't *try*. But all I do is try. And they don't get it, because they don't know about any of the other shit. They don't know. So I just look like an idiot who can't get into school because I don't *try*."

"It's not your fault, Steve." Billy said gently, looking at Steve's knees instead of his face. "You said it yourself, they don't know about all the secret shit. They don't get why your grades are crap."

Steve shook his head. "My grades have always been crap. I'm not... I'm not smart, and I know that, but I am *trying*. I just wish they could just fucking see that."

Billy let out a deep sigh and wished he had a cigarette, wished he could manhandle Steve into the bed behind him, strip him bare and mark every inch of his skin. Instead, he leaned further back against the side of the bed, ignoring the urge he had to burrow into Harrington, to scent him and curl around him and bite him. Fuck, Billy wanted to tackle him down and lick his fucking neck *so badly*.

"Preaching to the choir on that one, pretty boy." Because Neil would never believe that Billy was trying.

Steve sighed and pushed back so he was right beside Billy. He ran another hand over his warm face. It was quiet for a while, until Steve spoke again, his voice a low murmur in the silent room. “My dad wants me to work for him, but... I’d rather go through all that Upside Down shit again then listen to him tell me how stupid I am every day.”

Billy nodded, felt his eyes water a little as he stared at the closed bedroom door. Billy knew all about that – he’d honestly do just about anything if it meant he never had to see Neil again. He had to fight the *want* crawling through him to comfort Steve, to lean over and scent him properly, to cover Steve's body with his until he fell asleep. The preheat was making him emotional and needy. He should probably leave soon. He probably shouldn’t have come in the first place.

“Yeah.” Billy croaked out, nodding again.

He could feel Steve turn to look at him, but Billy didn’t look away from the door in front of them. If he looked at Steve right now... Billy might do something really stupid – like kiss him. Or, even more embarrassing, *hug* him.

“Thanks for helping me.” Steve sort of whispered, still looking at the side of Billy’s face.

Billy shrugged, looking down at his own knees. “It’s whatever, man.”

Steve reached over and took Billy’s wrist in his hand. Billy watched, watched as that wide hand came down and wrapped around Billy’s

wrist, thumb moving gently over the fine bones that lived there, over his scent gland, just how he'd done to Steve earlier. Billy's scent bloomed around them, his dick literally jumped against his thigh, slick beginning to spread. Billy was positive his pupils dilated from the touch.

"It's not whatever." Steve said quietly. "Not to me."

Billy glanced up and saw Steve looking down at their hands. His eyes were still a little shiny, but not with tears or panic, his face just beginning to lose a bit of the red flush. There was still a sadness that lined the edges of Steve's face, a resignation that Billy had noticed from November to January. Billy wanted to kiss him, wanted to kiss him so fucking badly.

He swallowed heavily and felt goosebumps prick over his skin. Time to go.

"Think you can get Wheeler to bring Max back later?" He asked, pulling Steve's attention back up. "I gotta get home."

Steve looked disappointed but nodded, letting go of Billy's wrist. It felt wrong now, empty. It was just the preheat talking, Billy reminded himself.

"I can take her back. No worries."

"Thanks. I owe you." Billy gave Steve one last look before hauling

himself up from the floor. He stopped by the door, looking back and catching Steve in the eye. "I'll call you later."

He didn't wait for Steve's response, just headed downstairs and slipped past the living room full of kids and out the door. He could feel the shivers licking his spine and the persistent goosebumps that wouldn't stop, his dick hard and leaking in his jeans. Fuck, his heat was coming on earlier than he thought. Probably triggered by Steve's breakdown, by the touch to his glands.

Fuck - Steve fucking Harrington was going to be the goddamn death of him and, honestly, Billy didn't think he'd mind.

6. Chapter 6

The school year ends with little fanfare.

Billy had spent the week of his heat locked in his bedroom, thoroughly fucking himself with Steve's name on his tongue and his scent in his nose. With Max literally ripping the phone from his wall, fielding calls about Billy being sick and aggressively turned down offers for Steve to drop by with soup. Billy would have broken the damn door down if Steve had dropped by. Would have fucked Steve right out there on the lawn for all the fucking housewives to see and wouldn't even have cared.

Following his heat had been harder than had Billy expected. Because after his last heat, Steve had still hated him. Billy had no reason to be close to him back then, had no reason to *know*. But, after this one, well, it had never been harder to keep himself from curling himself into Steve. From feeling his warmth, his embrace. Fuck – Billy had *ached* to feel Steve's hands in his hair, wanted that scent all over his skin, followed closely by his lips.

In a way, it had been worse after the heat than it had been before. Because before the heat Billy was horny and antsy and a little desperate. But after... after Billy was tired. After, Billy wanted to be held and coddled and cared for in a way he'd never been. Not since his mom left.

And it wasn't hard because Steve didn't want to do those things. It was hard because he *did*.

Steve was a caring person by nature. Billy might even say Steve had

more omega tendencies than he did. He had fluttered around Billy after he returned to school – buying him extra food and handing him cans of Ginger-Ale in the halls. Had once or twice rubbed his hand across Billy's back in a way that could easily be seen as friendly, but was deeply satisfying and calming. Steve had even run his fingers over Billy's wrists under the table at lunch, when they were outside of the arcade; lightly, fleetingly, but gentle and soothing.

It opened up a terrible yearning that Billy barely managed to control. If he had thought he was fucked before, it was nothing like after the heat. After was worse.

And then, just like that, Baseball season was over. They finished with their team winning, which had been more than nice. A good redemption for Hawkins High after failing to get to State earlier in the year.

Neil had even taken off work to come to the game. Because baseball had always been Neil's game, had always been something he pushed Billy to do. He sat in the stands with Susan and Max, then took Billy out for dinner after the win. Bought Billy a beer and clapped him on the shoulder, still too hard, still too tight, but with a smile on his lips as he told the waitress that Billy's team had won the championships. She'd brought them over a free slice of pie as a consolation.

His father's pride wouldn't last, of course. Because Billy would inevitably mouth off, or be mean to Max, or just *exist* too loudly for Neil's liking. But, he'd take what he could get in the meantime. Because there was still a stupid little part of him, deep, deep down, that wanted Neil to love him.

Laughable and pathetic, but there.

Billy had just shoved it all away and ate this fucking pie. Ignoring the shaking in his fingers that always happened when he got unsettled by fucking feelings and hoped Neil hadn't noticed.

There was a slew of parties the last two months of school that managed to distract Billy well enough.

Every weekend a kegger in the woods or a house party in some chick's basement. Once, even a park-and-pass down at the quarry.

Billy goes to literally as many parties as he can, so he doesn't have to be in the house. He even manages to corral Steve into coming with him to some of them. Mostly it's Tommy plastered against his side, drunk and sloppy and crooning about Carol's tits. Or some underclassman who looks at Billy like they want to eat him alive while trying to get him in the back of his car. Once in a while, when Billy can manage to drag him away from the kids, it's Steve, tucked up against his side as they stand in the kitchen of some house, cans of beer sweating in their hands as they shoot the shit.

Steve looks better and worse at the same time.

Things haven't changed with his parents much since that night Billy went into early heat. He tells Billy that his dad is on his case and his mom is disappointed that he won't be going off to school. Graduation changes literally nothing for him and Billy feels like shit for not being able to help him in some way. Because Steve is *thoughtful* and wanted to bring him goddamn soup and Billy can't even figure out how to make the guy's eyes look less dead.

But Steve looks good when he's with the kids – goofy and smiley and at ease. Billy doesn't know if it's pretend – the smiles and the laughter and the *everything's totally fine, guys* attitude, but as soon as school lets out for summer, Steve's shoulders do lose a little bit of their tension.

So they finish out their year driving around the brat squad and smoking up at the quarry late at night. Billy really attempts to pull Steve from whatever funk he's settled into and tries not to think about the way Steve had looked so broken that night. Tries not to think about how Steve's name tastes on his tongue, or how desperately Billy wants Steve to touch him. He *aches* for it. For any little or fleeting caress. It fucking embarrassing and the goddamn pining has never made him feel more like an omega, but, here he is.

Billy got a job at the pool.

He didn't apply. Well, he intended to, but as soon as he walked in, he was hired.

Everyone, graduated or not, knew who Billy Hargrove was. Knew he was from California, knew he surfed and had lived by the ocean. The guy – Jesse – had given him one look and hadn't even glanced at his application before handing him a pair of uniform shorts and a whistle from the back, telling him to come in the following weekend for the team meeting.

It had felt good, finally being able to prove himself, finally getting to

do something that he knew he was better at than anyone in Hawkins. Because Billy was meant to be in the water, his mom used to joke he was part fish when he was little. He'd always been an exceptionally strong swimmer and it helped that he had actually Lifeguarded back home. Granted, that was a public beach and not at a public pool, but drowning was drowning.

It was also the fact that apparently Hawkins actually trusted him enough to keep them from drowning that made Billy feel particularly warm.

Steve was a little pouty when Billy told him about it one afternoon.

They were perched out on the lawn chairs beside Steve's magnificent inground pool that he never used – which, okay, Billy understood why after hearing about the chick who'd basically been killed in it by those fucking critters – but Billy had no problem bullying Steve into letting *him* use it. Especially since the weather turned.

Billy had just hauled himself out of the water, leaning back in the chair and letting the harsh sun warm and dry him. Steve sat next to him, smoking a cigarette, in boardshorts and a loose t-shirt. It was the most skin Billy had seen Steve display outside of the school showers and Billy couldn't help but take it in like a fucking addict.

"I applied too." Steve toyed with the carton of Billy's cigarettes, the lit smoke dangling from between his lips in a way that had Billy *interested*.

"To the pool?" Billy couldn't keep the spark of excitement out of his

voice.

Would he literally get paid to hang out with Harrington all summer? Hang out with a shirtless, potentially wet, Steve all day long? Because, that was absolutely something he wanted.

But then Steve sighed dejectedly, effectively ruining all of Billy's vivid daydreams of getting fucked in the pool showers. "Yeah. But fucking Jesse won't hire me – even though I have the best lap time Hawkins High has ever seen!"

Billy reached over and plucked the cigarette from Steve's mouth with damp fingers. "Why not?" He asked as he took a deep inhale of smoke.

Steve looked away from the stolen cigarette currently in Billy's mouth and shrugged very not-casually as he toyed with the carton. "I... may have fucked his sister... and then never called her again..."

Billy leaned over and socked Steve in the arm – playfully, but hard. Steve yelped and rubbed the sort spot, looking at Billy with shock and betrayal.

"So we don't get to work together because *King Steve* couldn't keep his fucking dick in his pants?"

"It was years ago!" Steve cried out. "How was I supposed to know he'd still be mad about it!"

Billy laughed and shook his head. "You're lucky that you're so fucking pretty." Steve pouted and Billy snorted at the put-out look, handing him back the cigarette. "So, what're going to do."

Steve sighed, leaning back against the pool chair as he took a drag. "I applied at the mall."

"Fancy."

"Fuck off." Steve flipped him off and Billy laughed. "I went to basically every fucking store in the place. Full of teenagers doing the exact same thing. I'll be fucking lucky if I get a call from any of them."

"You'll get a call."

Steve turned to look at him. "You sound confident."

"I am." Billy nodded. "You're Steve fucking Harrington. Someone's going to hire you."

"Yeah," Steve sighed. "I hope you're right. Otherwise, it's a suit and tie and driving to Indianapolis every day."

"You'll get a call, Steve." Billy said aggressively, catching Steve's gaze

and looking at him meaningfully. “Now stop fucking worrying about it before I push you in the murder pool.”

Steve let out one of those real laughs, the one that always made Billy's heart beat a little faster, and jumped up. Billy followed him quickly, chasing him around the length of the pool in a way that was strictly not allowed at the public pool. The fucker was *fast* when he wanted to be, so Billy never actually got a chance to catch him and throw him in the water like he wanted, but it was fun, nonetheless.

Especially seeing Steve smile.

Billy felt like he hung the fucking moon when he was the one that made Steve smile.

Steve got the call a week later and came down to the pool with a couple of the goblin children to tell him about it.

He looked a little put out and pouty as he tossed Billy a can of Coke up the Lifeguard chair and he said he'd be slinging ice cream for the summer. Billy just smirked but didn't laugh, they weren't laughing about this yet. Billy promised to visit him.

And so, he did.

Went down on his next day off and sidled up to *Scoops Ahoy!*, located in the middle of the brand new mall.

And, Billy was really not expecting to see Steve Harrington in a fucking sailor uniform. In *shorts* that looked a little too tight to be regulation.

Steve just pouted at Billy from behind the counter, arms spread wide as he leaned on it, making his shoulders look wider than they already were. There was a stupid hat on his head, and Billy just knew that Steve was pissed about it ruining his hair. Billy couldn't keep the smile from his lips as he looked Steve over.

“Wow.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

Billy smirked as he leaned against the counter, flirty like he shouldn't be with Steve – especially not out in fucking public. But Billy couldn't help himself – Steve was wearing *sailor shorts*. He couldn't be held responsible for his actions.

“Now, is that any way to treat a paying customer?”

Steve rolled his eyes and Billy let his smile grow. “You want a fucking sample or not.”

“Yeah,” Billy licked his lips. “I want a fucking sample, pretty boy.”

Steve’s cheeks pinked as he rolled his eyes again and moved toward the display case next to them. “Tone it down, hotshot. What do you want to try?”

Billy followed him over and stared down at the buckets of ice cream. “I don’t fucking know, Harrington. Just give me a taste of something good.”

Steve’s throat bobbed as he swallowed, the flush reaching down to his sailor collar. Billy wanted to follow it with his mouth, he wanted to mark him up so bad. “Here.” Steve thrust a little spoon into the ice cream and then handed it to him.

It was good, a bit too sweet, and it made Billy lick his lips a couple times to place the flavor. He shrugged, “It’s alright.”

“You’re a snob.”

“Takes one to know one, princess.” Billy smirked and Steve playfully rolled his eyes.

Steve handed him another little spoon with a different flavor, Billy tried that one too. Steve made him try a handful of flavors, noting his reaction to each one before pulling out a scooper and handing Billy a

little bowl without asking him for his input. Billy licked the adult-sized spoon and let the pleasing taste of caramel melt over his tongue.

“How’s the pool?” Steve asked, once again leaning against the counter.

Billy mirrored him, eating the small bowl of ice cream that Steve was very obviously not charging him for, and shrugged a little. “It’s a fucking community pool, man. Not like I really have to worry about anyone fucking dying.”

Steve sighed forlornly, eyes very deliberately sweeping over Billy’s exposed shoulders, lingering a little on his chest and neck in a way that made Billy tingle, then gestured towards his Hawkins Pool tank top. “You’re getting so fucking tan. I’m jealous, man. You get to be out in the sun, yelling at people, flirting with girls in bathing suits, and here I am, fucking *wasting away*. Locked up in the goddamn mall, slinging ice cream to underclassmen who won’t even give me the time of day.”

Billy tried not to let the thoughts of Steve flirting with the girls and omegas of Hawkins get to him. He snorted, because that’s what he would’ve done normally when Steve got dramatic and licked his spoon clean. Acting nonchalant in front of Steve was getting a lot harder than Billy had ever anticipated.

“You’re so goddamn dramatic.” Billy said around another spoonful of ice cream. “At least it’s air conditioned in here. And don’t even try to tell me that the brats aren’t visiting you all the time.”

Steve pouted a little and shrugged. "Dustin's off at camp, and Mike and El have been attached at the hip. Will, Max, and Lucas come in sometimes, but... it's just not the same."

"It's just for the summer, Harrington." Billy said uncharacteristically soft for being out in public. "Once all the kids are back together, you'll feel better."

"Yeah." Steve sighed.

"We still on for Tuesday."

They were both off from work and planned on getting high and eating pizza – not all that exciting, but Billy had been looking forward to it. To getting to just... be around Steve, alone for once. Aside from the times that Steve had brought the kids to the pool, Billy really hadn't seen much of him. That was mostly because Billy was on the pool's schedule as much as possible to stay out of the house, but he like, *missed* Steve or whatever.

Steve brightened at the mention of Tuesday and nodded, "Of course. I just bought from Tommy's cousin yesterday, we're all ready to go."

"Better not invite your *best friend* to crash our little play-date, Harrington." Billy smirked, a joking lilt to his voice and eyes, even though he very much meant what he said. "I don't like to share."

Tommy had been all over both of them since him and Steve's little

heart-to-heart back in the Spring. He showed up at all the parties, often invited himself over to the small group gatherings at Steve's – leaving quickly most of the time when he realized it was just the kids playing D&D. Tommy seemed to be constantly afraid that he was missing out on Steve and Billy's attention and it was fucking annoying the hell out of Billy.

But then Steve blinked owlishly before his brow furrowed, a slight pull at the corners of his lips that wasn't quite a frown but close to it. "Tommy's not my best friend." He looked at Billy like that was fucking obvious. "You're my best friend."

Billy straight up choked on the spoon in his mouth, ice cream sliding down his throat. He coughed and looked at Steve, who was looking down at him with concern. "I'm what?"

Steve rolled his eyes, but Billy could see that flush along Steve's neck resurface. "All we do is hang out and talk – obviously you're my best friend."

And Billy wanted to say, *was it obvious?* Because until this moment Billy had just thought they were *friends*. But to hear that Steve now considered him one of the closest people in his life was... well, it was a lot.

Billy hummed as he pulled the spoon from his mouth and let his gaze trace over Steve. The flush on his neck, curling up toward his jaw and making those dark moles stand out in a way that made Billy want to put his mouth on them. The challenging look in his dark eyes, begging Billy to say different.

“Yeah, alright.” Billy said a lot more casually than he actually felt. “I’ll be your best friend, Harrington.”

Steve rolled his eyes, but that slight frown turned up into a sweet little smile that Billy could tell Steve was attempting to curb. “Don’t do me any favors now, Hargrove.”

“Putting up with you *is* the favor.”

Steve pushed roughly at Billy shoulder, almost knocking him over, and Billy laughed. Like, really laughed.

He hadn’t laughed in a long time. Not since California. Not since the beach and tall waves and gentle hands pulling him up from the sand.

Steve just watched him from across the counter with a private little smile and soft eyes.

Fuck – this was going to be harder than he thought.

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So, Billy stops by *Scoops* as often as he can – on his days off, after his early shifts end, before his late shifts, and sometimes even after. Billy would lock up at the pool and drive over to the mall, waiting around

for Steve to close up so they could share a smoke in the back parking lot.

Steve comes by the pool when he can. Manages to drag whatever unoccupied brat with him, even Max – who pretends to be annoyed but Billy can tell she misses the water and the sunshine too.

Billy is on shift a lot. He wanted to spend literally as much time out of the house and away from Neil as he possibly could. Because he works so often, he spends most of the time with Heather. She's sort of a bitch and isn't afraid to flirt with him outright, but he kind of likes working with her the most out of all the rotating Lifeguards. Because she gives him shit but also doesn't care if he breaks any of the rules.

See, Heather's the type of person who doesn't really care, Billy's figured out. She knows she's hot, she knows that she's funny, she knows how to have a good time. Heather will smirk at him over the rim of her glasses when Billy wanders in hungover on a morning shift, but will also flirt with Jesse to get them both off on Saturdays without prompting. Because she *likes* Billy, thinks he's charming. But she's not *charmed* by him, Billy realizes a few weeks into working together – not like the moms, not like the underclassmen that try to get in his car, not like most of the people he's managed to con in Hawkins into thinking he's something special.

They're *friendly* – which, Billy knows from his experience with Harrington is only one jump away from *friends*. It's weird, to have someone outside of Steve and Tommy and the brat squad that wants to spend time with him without anything in return. It's weird. All he know is that Heather seems to enjoy his company and Billy could honestly say the same.

It's weird, but it's nice.

Except when she aggressively flirts with him in front of the moms to get them riled up and then sidles away, laughing.

The moms are by far the best and worst thing part of working at the Hawkins Community Pool.

Flirting with them like he does gives him the perfect cover – because while they all like to look at him, like to chat him up and flirt, none of them are actually willing to risk their marriages for a teenager. And if it looks like he's into older tail, it gives him a really great excuse as to why he's not dating around right now.

Can't really go around saying he doesn't do more than a hard fuck in the back of his car because he's secretly an Omega and also sort of in love with Steve Harrington. So. Moms it is.

It's one of the days where he works the early shift, which means he's off just after mid-day. His skin is still warm from sitting shirtless up in the chair, he smells vaguely like chlorine and sunscreen and sweat, even after the shower - but when doesn't he have that hazy ozone smell clinging to his skin these days.

He saunters into the mall and lets the cool, artificial air waft over him, suppressing a small shiver at the feeling. He hadn't bothered to change out of his uniform, so his legs and arms were bare, goosebumps pricking at his exposed skin. Girls smiled coyly at him as he passed, Billy smirked back mostly out of habit.

Scoops was full of preteens as Billy walked up. A gaggle of little girls in front of the counter, demanding Steve give them more samples. Billy was pretty sure that Sinclair's sister was the ringleader of this particular circus. He just crossed his arms over his chest and waited, smirking at Steve's eye rolls as he handed out little spoons.

Eventually the mob of small girls moved away from the counter and Billy was able to saunter up like he'd been thinking about all morning. Steve looked cute with his little pout and his stupid sailor hat and his *shorts*. Billy would bet actual money that he'd taste like ice cream if Billy kissed him.

"They'll be the death of me." Steve sighed dramatically.

Billy snorted at Steve's exaggeration, only to hear another one as Buckley came out of the backroom. Billy felt his hackles raise a little as the other Omega came to lean on the counter near Steve.

Because Buckley was the perfect kind of Omega for Steve – tall and pretty, but in an odd sort of way, smart as hell, uncaring and sarcastic and *cool*. Billy thought she was cool. He'd never fucking admit it out loud, but he did.

She was smirky and a little dead-eyed and made fun of Steve every time Billy stopped in, capturing his attention and pulling Steve's focus away. It was fucking annoying. Billy wanted Steve to ignore her, pretend she wasn't there. No such luck.

“What’s the flavor today, Hargrove?” She had this permanent sort of smirky-smile tucked into the corner of her lips that gave Billy the urge to narrow his eyes.

“Whatever Harrington decides I like today.”

It was an ongoing thing – Steve was convinced that Billy didn’t even *like* ice cream and force-fed him different flavors, determined to figure out what he actually liked.

Billy, of course, knew that the way he phrased it was much flirtier than necessary and he should be careful. He was out in public, he was in front of another Omega, someone who went to their school. But... Billy was jealous.

He was jealous of Robin. Jealous of the way she got to spend literally all her time beside Steve. Jealous of the way she could flaunt her designation without worry. Jealous, because he was worried that Steve would realize that he wanted an Omega like her.

It was ridiculous, and risky, and emotional. But Billy *liked* Steve and that made him stupid.

So, Billy continued leaned against the counter, eyes narrowed at Buckley, as Steve rolled his eyes and made Billy his ice cream. Buckley just casually crossed her arms and stared at Billy right back.

“Come on, Hargrove.” Steve moved toward the back room with

Billy's ice cream. "Robin, I'm on break."

"Yeah, dingus, got that."

Billy pushed himself from the counter and followed Steve into the backroom. It was small, and not really private, but they'd sit back there for a few minutes and then take the back exit out to the employee lot and share a cigarette. It was their routine, it was something Billy looked forward to and relied on. Because Steve Harrington had become a constant in his life and Billy needed this, needed him. He tried to pretend that didn't make him weak.

Steve dropped down with a sigh into one of the folding chairs beside him and handed Billy the bowl once he was seated. Billy takes a spoonful – banana and peanut butter – humming at the taste. Steve watched him, eyes darting between the spoon between his lips and Billy's eyes and his bare shoulders.

"How's the pool?"

"Boring." Billy says casually as he eats his free ice cream. "Morning shifts are never exciting. That calisthenics class is full of fucking old people is bathing suits jamming out to Elvis, man, and then the AquaTots swimming lessons are a real treat to sit through right after."

Steve snorted, "I bet."

Billy watched him for a moment, let his gaze trail over Steve's hair and his stupid uniform and his legs. "When's Curley-cue coming home?"

"Couple days." Steve smiled openly, then reeled it in, almost embarrassed. "I miss that kid."

The little doors covering the window to the backroom opened, Buckley's head poked through. "Dingus, your children are here." She sighed, voice full of disdain. "*Again.*"

Steve sighed, getting up and opening the back door. "Seriously, again?"

"Come on." Billy heard Mike plead.

He could see the moment Steve broke down against their pouting - shoulders sort of sloping, eyes rolling. Steve opened the door wider to let them pass. The brat squad filed in one after the other, all of them basically ignoring Billy as they entered.

Max wandered over as Steve moved to unlock the back door and looked into his ice cream cup. He offered it to her silently, she took it and ate a couple spoonfuls, eyes going bright at the flavor.

"That's good, Steve!" She said as she passed, following the herd of gremlins out the back door.

“Peanut butter and banana.”

“I want that next time!”

Steve rolled his eyes but smiled as he held the door to the back hallway open. “I’ll remember.”

Billy watched them trot out, shaking his head as they fled away like little ducklings, to sneak into a movie. He stood from the folding chair, tossed the empty ice cream cup, licking his lips.

Steve eyed him from where he still held the door open and gestured for Billy to follow him. “Come on. Let’s go smoke.”

Billy followed after him, through the winding white-walled hallways until they went out the employee door that led to the parking lot. The lot was busy, as it always was these days, and Billy was sure him and Steve certainly looked like a fucking pair – Billy in his red pool shorts and tank-top and Steve in his little fucking sailor outfit.

He snorted, ignoring Steve’s look as he unlocked his car. Billy slid into the passenger’s seat, opening up the glove compartment and taking out the smokes Steve had in there. He lit one up and took a drag before passing it to Steve.

They shared the cigarette and talked about stupid shit – mall patrons,

pool patrons, their shared goblin children, how Steve missed Henderson, how it was only the beginning of summer and Billy was already sad about it ending. They briefly touched on Billy's senior year, on what Steve was planning on doing after August. There wasn't much of a plan for either of them.

It was nice, just being able to sit with Steve like this. To have all of his attention to himself. To know that Steve *wanted* to be here with him. Warmed him in a way nothing else managed to.

Eventually Steve's break was up, and Billy walked back to the Camaro with the promise to be over at Steve's for D&D later in the week. They had a routine now, one that Billy would try hard not to break. Because it was important to him, because *Steve* was important to him.

This was really going to end up biting Billy in the ass, he was sure of it.

Notes for the Chapter:

I already know you're disappointed Steve didn't find out about Billy's heat. but don't fret! this will cover the events of season 3 and I really wanted to make Billy's part in that realistic. so don't hate me!! Steve will definitely find out soon!! & thank you all for your lovely responses! it fills me with so much joy reading through them!!

7. Chapter 7

Billy is standing in the middle of the goddamn mall, on the fourth of July, really trying to figure out how they got here.

Because a couple days ago, everything had been fine.

A couple days ago, Billy had been standing in the same mall with Steve, trying not to stare at his ass in those stupid sailor shorts, and now he was cleaning blood off Steve's face.

A couple days ago *monsters* were just something they told him about. And now, here he was, trying to fight a fucking meat monster that had possessed his... friend.

Because Heather was his friend.

Billy had decided that she was his friend when he agreed to pretend to be her 'perfect' boyfriend during dinner with her parents. *Just help me get them off my back, Billy. Please? I'll convince Jesse to give you the whole weekend off, c'mon.* If he was going to sit through dinner in a polo shirt and make nice with Heather's dad, they were friends.

But that had been days ago, before...

Well, before.

Before Max and El had crashed the dinner party at the Holloway's and had all but dragged him out of the house. Max begging, literally pleading with him to come with her – her scent all ragged and sharp with fear. Billy ended up excusing himself with an easy lie about having to get the girls home.

And Billy could admit that Heather had been a little off. Could see how she had reacted strangely to his leaving. But in the moment, he hadn't been thinking about Heather. Mostly he was annoyed at the girls as he shuffled them out of the house and back out into the rain. And maybe a bit worried, because Max didn't react like that. Max had literally never begged Billy for anything in her life.

So, he threw Max's bike in the trunk and took the girls home. Made them explain what the fuck was going on, why they had barged into Heather's house like the fucking Manson Family.

That's when they told him what El had seen in the void.

Up until now, Billy really only had limited interactions with El. He had met her officially a few months ago at one of the ongoing D&D games at Steve's house, a quick little hello as she stared into his damn soul as Billy wandered up to Steve's room. Since then, it had been mostly just in passing until her and Max had started getting closer at the beginning of summer.

Having El's full attention was... strange.

For a little girl, psychic experiment or not, she was really fucking intense. And Billy couldn't help the feeling that she knew more about him than she was letting on, which made him wildly uncomfortable.

But he knew about monsters now. Knew that baby Byers had been possessed by some shadow creature that controlled the *thing* that had fallen out of the fridge that night. So, he listened. Sat on his bed and listened to the girls as they told him about what El had accidentally stumbled upon, what they had just begun to piece together.

Max looked odd sitting on his old, worn-in couch. She didn't normally spend any real amount of time in his room, so to have these two little girls give him pleading eyes amongst his fucking dirty clothes and records was super weird.

But he listened.

He tried to convince them that nothing was wrong with Heather, that El's wires must've been crossed or something. But they didn't believe him, they weren't listening. El had that haunted look in her eye and Max's ragged scent was just *doing things* to Billy's resolve. They only left his room once he finally agreed to help them look into what El had seen the next day.

Billy watched them slink out and knew, just fucking *knew*, that things were about to change.

Max wakes him up too early and demands that he bring them over to the Wheelers. Apparently baby Byers knew something too.

So, Billy sits in the Wheeler's basement while eating a cookie Karen Wheeler had given to him with a smile - which is just absolutely fucking weird - listening to the baby Byers talk about being possessed, and whatever *The Gate* was, and things Billy had not been around for after fucking Steve up and getting knocked out.

Listening to them makes him feel squirmy and uncomfortable, makes him angry that these *kids* have zero self-preservation. But he listens, and he learns, and he eats his damn cookie. He drives them to the pool to check on Heather when they ask. Because he's curious, because he desperately wants them to be wrong about whatever *this* is.

They spy from the parking lot with a pair of binoculars that *of course* Mike carries around with him – the fucking dork. And – Heather looks fine. Maybe not normal, because Billy never knew her to wear anything over her standard issue *Baywatch*-styled suit – especially not a giant long-sleeved t-shirt and athletic shorts. But that could be explained, if they really wanted it to. Billy sees in their eyes that none of the kids actually believe that though.

But then Mike's got a plan.

He drags Billy into the Men's room and asks about the Sauna. Billy reluctantly agrees it could work, if they can figure out a way to get Heather inside after the pool closes for the night.

Billy's the bait.

And, honestly, it's not a role Billy has ever played before. Not a role he ever thought he'd play. But he'll do it. Because he wants to prove them wrong. Because he doesn't want Heather to be possessed or *flayed* or whatever the hell the kids call it. He doesn't want that to be true. Because Heather's his *friend*.

They wait until the pool starts closing, the boys and El begin setting up the trap, Billy and Max is in the parking lot keeping a watchful eye. Once the parking lot clears, Billy slinks over and waits for Heather by the door. Listens to the lone shower stop, listens to the clanging metal of her locker opening and closing, and then he opens the door to the Women's room and calls out for her, asking if she's still there.

Heather comes out, hair dripping, skin wet, in little more than track shorts and a tank top, face void of the smirky-smile she always gives Billy, like they have a secret. It's unlike her, Billy realizes. Because Heather Holloway is not an unfashionable or unfriendly girl, and that's when it sort of hits them that the kids might be right. As much as he wanted to deny it, as much as he was hoping it wasn't true, it was becoming more and more obvious that it was.

Billy plays his part – apologizes for leaving dinner so suddenly the night before, promises to make it up to her, somehow – offers to cover her shift tomorrow if she wants. And then, they hear the noise. He knows it's El's powers projecting it to them, it's still weird to have her in his head.

They look at each other and Billy moves toward the Men's room with Heather hot on his heels. He feels bad for lying to her, for trapping her the way he is, but if she really is possessed, he's not risking the kids' safety by letting her go.

So, they stalk into the showers and check the stalls, looking at each other like they're a team, all while Billy's leading her to the Sauna, to the kids, to El. Heather pushes him out of the way as soon as they reach the Sauna and goes for the throat in a way that's unnatural for a girl her size, even if it is just a CPR dummy.

Billy watches as El locks her in and tries not to feel bad for her.

But Heather pleads to them, to Billy specifically. She cries, like really cries, and it hurts something inside of him to see it. Billy can't really stand women crying, it reminds him of his mother, breaks a part of him. Max, who never knew his mother and doesn't really know more than the basic details of what happened to her, notices and takes his wrist in her hand anyway. It's to keep him from going to Heather, but it's also for comfort, Billy realizes.

The hotter the Sauna gets, the more emotional Heather becomes. Screaming, begging, pleading for them to let her go. She keeps crying out about how it's not her fault, about how sorry she is, about the things *it* made her do. The shadow – the Mind Flayer.

And then, Heather breaks the glass and removes the metal pipe and Will starts yelling about it being *activated*. The small room is *reeking* of fear and anger, Billy almost chokes on it as he watches Heather step forward. She's covered in black veins – something straight out of a goddamn horror movie - and breaks out of the Sauna.

Billy pushes the kids behind him, staring Heather down. But she's no longer looking at him, she's looking at El.

It's the first time Billy sees El use her powers.

She throws a fucking weighted barbell with her mind and Heather *catches* it. Tosses it away like it's nothing. She grabs El by the throat and just *lifts*. Billy moves without thinking.

Grabs Heather's arms and wrists and pries them off of El the best he can, until Heather turns and grabs him by the throat as well. He can't breathe, can feel himself struggling and beginning to pass out when Mike moves and hit her with the pipe. Heather drops them and Billy sputters for breath, gasping for air. Then El throws Heather through a fucking brick wall, hysterically crying, blood running down her face.

Max rushed to him when he fell from Heather's grip, but Billy's eyes are on the giant fucking hole in the wall. His eyes are on Heather as she picks herself up and literally runs away.

Billy drives the girls back to his house again. He won't let them go anywhere else, his instinct fucking *screaming* at him to make sure that they're okay. To take care of them. To protect them.

It's absurd. El just fucking tossed someone through a goddamn brick wall, she doesn't need to be protected by *Billy*. But he can't help himself. El hasn't stopped crying and Max is misty-eyed and scared. El, interestingly enough, doesn't have a scent – even unrepresented as she is – but fear oozes out of her regardless.

So, he tells the boys to fuck off, to all go sleep at Mike's, and that they'll be over in the morning. Mike doesn't like it, wants them all to be together, wants El near him after what just happened. But he's barely older than a pup, so Billy doesn't give a shit what he wants.

Neil and Susan are still out at the movies when they get home, so Billy sits the girls down at the kitchen table and cleans up El's face – the blood and the snot and the tears – and just looks at them for a moment.

Most of the time Max looks old to Billy. Mature and bratty, and sometimes even womanly – like he can clearly see the person she'll grow into. But right now, well, right now they look like little girls and something in Billy just sort of breaks. He gently swipes a hand over Max's hair and neck, scent marking her in a way that's supposed to be soothing. He's not really sure if he's doing it right though, he's never tried to do it before.

It makes Max cry. He does the same thing to El and she seems to settle from it.

He hands them ice-pops because it's hot out and they're sad. He doesn't know what to do with kids – especially traumatized ones – so he does what he would have liked done for him at their age. He sets

them up in the living room and sits with them on the couch, letting the tv just play. They fall asleep on either side of him and when Neil and Susan get home, they stop and stare.

Billy doesn't understand what he sees in Neil's eyes, a complicated look that Billy can't comprehend. But it's different from the warmth in Susan's, from the small smile on her face at the sight of the girls wrapped around him. He leaves them on the couch and goes to bed, ignoring his dad's look down the hallway.

They arrive at the Wheeler's early the next morning and Billy feels like he has déjà vu.

El looks in the void for Chief Hopper – who is apparently her father? – and Byers' mom, because no one's heard from either of them in too long. Nancy and Jonathan bust down the basement door soon after, surprised to see Billy, even more surprised when he doesn't know where Steve is.

Because during all of this possession drama, Billy hadn't even thought about Steve or Henderson. He'd been so focused on Max and the kids and Heather that it hadn't even crossed his mind to think why they weren't here.

Nancy moves past Steve's absence as quickly as it came up because she's managed to piece some things together and Billy gets to watch

it happen live. He knew Nancy was smart, but he hadn't realized *how* smart until right now.

Because Billy has spent the least amount of time with Nancy and Jonathan. Because outside of lunch and Friday night D&D, he barely sees them. And, they weren't his friends, they were Steve's. Even if they didn't actively hate him anymore, it wasn't like they were vying to hang out with him one-on-one.

And, also, he's felt weird around Nancy after she watched him calm Steve down from his panic spiral. Felt *seen* by her in a way that made him wildly uncomfortable. So, he did what he does best and avoided her. No fucking dice with that anymore, it seemed

But they weren't kicking him out, Billy realized as he watched Nancy stalk around pontificating.

Surprised to see him, sure, but ultimately accepting him into the fold without a second thought and moving on to work through what they'd managed to figure out about the *Mind Flayer*.

And it was then that Billy realized that he wasn't just Max's stepbrother, newly redeemed. He wasn't just Steve's friend who had gotten dragged into this mess. He was *a part* of it, the group. A part of all this now.

He wasn't given a chance to dwell on that new knowledge because they were going back to Heather's house.

Jonathan slid into the passenger seat of the Wheeler's new station wagon, the boys following suit. Billy hesitated, only for a moment, before going to the Camaro. Max and El instantly followed him without prompting.

It warmed something in him to have them follow his lead, to have them actually *want* to go with him. Made his chest swell because it meant they felt *safe* with him.

He wouldn't let their trust be misplaced. Not this time.

The door to the Holloway house was wide open when they go there. Billy felt a shiver run down his spine.

They entered cautiously, the silence ringing out. The smell of chemicals led them into the kitchen, the refrigerator turned over on it's side, cleaning products open and empty all around. The dining room table was literally exactly how Billy had left it the other night when the girls had interrupted dinner – food spoiled and rotten, drink glasses still half-filled.

All except for the blood Nancy finds on the floor, blood that leads them to the garage.

Billy has a mess of emotions swirling in his stomach at the sight of the trail of blood, at the sight of rope and tape and all that insinuated. It would have been him; he realizes. If Max and El hadn't showed up and literally dragged him from the house the way they had, this would have been him.

Both Max and El seem to sense what he's thinking about as he stares at the rope in Nancy's hands, as they all talk over each other about *the source*, and someone named *Mrs. Driscoll*. Max steps closer to him, her body leaning just slightly against his, grounding him. If they were the type to be touchy-feely, she probably would've taken his hand. But they weren't, and her presence beside him was enough to pull him out of his thoughts.

So, they go to the hospital.

Nancy charges them into the building and past the check-in desk, but they're stopped by the receptionist. Billy stays down in the lobby with the kids while Nancy and Jonathan go up to jailbreak whoever the fuck Mrs. Driscoll is. They want her to lead them to the source.

At some point, the lights begin to flicker and baby Byers stands from his chair, staring off in that way he does that makes Billy's stomach drop. Because that stare is never good, that stare means something's wrong. The rest of the kids stand as well, staring at the flickering lights and the way Will touches the back of his neck. It doesn't take long for El to charge forward, past the reception desk and down the hallway, the rest of them following.

El finds Nancy and Jonathan up on an abandoned floor that's under construction. Jonathan screaming and attempting to break a door down with a CO2 tank to get to Nancy. Billy grabs him and pulls him out of the way as El breaks down the door with her mind.

Billy sees the creature for the first time.

Or whatever part of the Mind Flayer that thing is supposed to be.

It's hulking and grotesque, mangled flesh and protruding limbs and so many teeth. It's hunched over Nancy, ready to take a bite before turning to attack them. El throws it around the same way she had Heather at the pool – easy and almost effortless, if it wasn't for the screaming and the blood running from her nose. She tosses it out a window without a second thought.

When they follow it down, they watch as the giant, hulking creature descends into a goopy mass. Slinking across the pavement until it slides down the drain, leaving only blood and bone in its wake.

It's late and Billy doesn't know what to do. Max seems to have the same thought because El has spent the last couple days at their house, he knows she's worried about pushing Neil's limits and she doesn't want to hit that particular wall in the middle of all this. They give each other a look before Max turns back to the group.

"I think we should all stick together tonight." She looks to Will and Jonathan. "Can we all stay at your house, since your mom is with Hopper?"

Jonathan and Will share a look, saying something with their eyes in that way siblings are often able to do. "That's a good idea, Max." Jonathan says after he looks away.

"Yeah," Nancy agrees. "Why don't we head over there and call our

parents.”

So, they pack up and head to the Byers, leaving the bones and the blood and the drain that thing escaped down. Max calls first, begs her mom for a sleepover at El’s. Susan agrees, because El is the police chief’s daughter and because it’s summer. Max mentions that Billy will drop them off after the movie he’s taking them to see. It’s a nice lie, one that will sell easily to Neil.

Once everyone calls, they settle for the night. Nancy and Jonathan slink off to his room, Will brings Mike and Lucas into his room, and Billy sleeps out on the couch with the girls on the floor in front of him.

It’s weird to be back in this house. He’s avoided it since that night. Hasn’t come when D&D was scheduled here, only to pick Max up or drop her off. He doesn’t like the way it makes him feel to see it, to see the place where he’d almost killed Steve Harrington, the place where he terrorized the kids. Doesn’t like the way Mrs. Byers looks at him with a sort of *knowing* gaze.

But no one seems to think twice about him being here now. And, granted, they had a lot going on, Billy’s internal crisis wasn’t really top priority. But it still threw him that no one seemed to care that he was here for this, that he was helping, that he was involved.

Maybe he shouldn’t care either.

Sleep was hard that night, mind caught up with where the hell Steve was during all this, wondering how different this would all be if he

was here beside him. Maybe it was better this way, that Steve was off with Henderson doing... whatever they were doing, because then Billy didn't have to worry about him, didn't have to split his focus between him and the kids. Because Max and El were his priority right now. They had to be.

In the morning, they head over to Chief Hopper's cabin at El's request. She wants to search for Heather, for the Holloways, for Mrs. Driscoll, basically anyone they know who had contact with the Flayer. She locks herself in her room for most of the early morning.

Mike and Max fight about El's powers, Billy ignores them best he can, eating a bowl of the Chief's cereal and trying to stay out of the argument, even though both of them kept trying to pull him into it.

Billy honestly had no idea what about him screamed *tell me about your middle school drama*, but he needed to know so he could make sure it never happened again. When they realize he's not getting involved, they go bother Nancy who was making phone call after phone call about some rat infestation.

Then El finds Heather.

Says she's back at the Holloway house. It's a trap – they all know it's a trap. But El has an idea – she wants to get into Heather's head and see where the source is, no in-person contact necessary.

Mike doesn't like it, but it's easy to tell Mike to fuck off. El smirks a little at Billy as she gets into position in front of the tv.

She's stuck in some sort of loop of Heather's memories, describing a flower field on the edge of town that Nancy and Jonathan confirm is in Hawkins. She pushes through and she finds the source, a steelworks factory – Brimborn. Mike tries to bring her out of it, out of the void and Heather's head, but he can't.

Whatever she sees is triggering. She cries out, whimpers, Billy can see tears fall from beneath her bandana, but they can't wake her up. It's distressing, everyone's scents are wild and all over the place. And while the kids were all unprepared – making their scents barely distinguishable and clean like a Beta's – the emotional stress of the last couple days was getting to them. Honestly, Billy wouldn't be surprised if one of them presented immediately after all this was over.

El whips her blindfold off very suddenly and curls into Mike's waiting arms, crying. They move her to the couch, let her settle, before launching in on what just happened. She describes what the Flayed-Heather had said to her, how the Mind Flayer's army was coming for her. For them.

A few things happen quickly after that.

Nancy hears a noise outside. Will touches the back of his neck in that way the means trouble. And when they run outside to make a break for it, a creature one-hundred times bigger than the one at the hospital makes its way through the trees.

Billy honestly can't believe his eyes. That thing in the fridge in November had been the size of a large dog. The thing at the hospital earlier looked like a small car. This thing... this thing was taller than the trees surrounding them.

Nancy ran to the shed as the kids ran inside. Jonathan pulled Billy away from where he was stuck staring and dragged him over to where Nancy was grabbing a gun. She grabbed another and shoved it into Billy's hands. As soon as they were inside, they barricaded the cabin door, huddled in a circle in the middle of the room.

It was silent for a moment – only a moment – before absolute chaos.

Taloned tentacles shot through the cabin walls, searching and aiming for El, but willing to take anyone in its path. Nancy started firing, Billy followed suit.

Jonathan got knocked out, Nancy's gun jammed, but El was fast enough to save her. More and more tentacles shot into the cabin, El killing each one, until the ceiling shot open and suddenly El was in the air.

The kids moved immediately, grabbing on to her and pulling her down. Billy threw Nancy his shotgun and grabbed El by the armpits, holding on with more strength than the kids could manage.

El was screaming, and Nancy was shooting, and the monster was making this awful sort of noise, and Billy just kept pulling. The

muscles in his arms bulging, protesting, but he wouldn't let go. And then Lucas was hacking the tentacle with Jonathan's axe, the monster dropping El on top of them.

Mike quickly dislodged the claw that had latched on to El's ankle, helping her to stand. The monster roared at her from the hole in the cabin's roof and El roared back. Billy watched as the creature's head split down in two.

They fled quickly to the cars and drove away from the cabin inappropriately fast. Billy was in the lead, flying down the back roads into town. Max was in the back seat with Mike putting pressure on El's wound. Billy made sure he could still see Nancy behind him before turning down the next road and picked the closest store he could think of.

Once inside, Max and Billy dressed El's wound. Max says to the group *trust me, I skateboard*, but that's not the only reason she knows how to help Billy the way she id. They don't talk about it, don't address it, but Billy can see it in her eyes as he efficiently cleans and wraps El's ankle.

Billy follows after Max to give Mike and El a moment alone, listens to Lucas' idea about the fireworks and tells them to get a cart. They rush back over at the sound of Dustin's choppy voice over the walkie.

Apparently, they need to get to the mall.

Billy feels his stomach sink a little with the realization that wherever Henderson is, Steve probably is too.

The mall is closed then they arrive.

Dark and empty, save for the guys with guns Billy can see through the glass of the front doors. Billy leads them over to employee entrance that him and Steve use frequently for smoke breaks, El pops the locks easily.

The back hallways are eerily quiet as they move through them, choosing to enter from one of the stores on the second level, hopefully buying them a little time to escape the men with guns.

When they exit through a clothing store, they see the men slide into formation, guns drawn and pointed at a counter a couple of stores down from *Scoops*. El set the display car alarm off to grab their attention before tossing the car at them and wiping them out in one swoop.

From behind the counter, Steve, Buckley, Henderson, and Sinclair's little sister slowly stand. Billy felt his heart pound a little off rhythm at the sight of them. At the sight of Steve. At the sight of Steve's *face*.

They raced down the escalator steps and Henderson threw himself at El and Mike. Steve went right up to Billy, who was followed closely by Nancy and Jonathan. Billy couldn't stop himself from reaching

out, his hand finding Steve's arm, holding onto him as Billy looked him over.

Everyone was talking over each other, catching up on the things they'd all missed while separated. Billy didn't say anything, just listened and let his gaze trail over Steve's bruised face. His eye was practically swollen shut, his lip busted, his nose had obviously only recently stopped bleeding. The fact that he was still talking through the pain told Billy something more must be going on.

Then El collapsed, pulling Billy's attention from Steve's injuries, and they found a fucking *parasite* in her leg. A parasite which had definitely not been there when Billy dressed the wound. Or maybe it had just been hiding – didn't the kids keep saying that the Mind Flayer liked to hide?

Jonathan jumped up and ran across the court, Billy moved behind El, Mike on his other side. Jonathan came back with a fucking giant kitchen knife and a wooden spoon, and he looked at Billy, who sighed and moved to hold El down.

She screamed around the wood in her mouth, shoulders tensing beneath Billy's hands. She stopped them when it became too much and pulled the fucking thing out of her leg herself. Glass shattering and air quaking around them as she did.

And then, the Chief was standing before them. Billy had never thought he'd be so happy to see a fucking cop, but, here he was.

Which leads him to this moment. To wiping blood off Steve's face

best he can with a rag Buckley had pulled from behind the *Scoops* counter, while the kids caught up the Chief and Byers' mom on everything that had happened in the last couple days.

Steve and Buckley tell him about the Russians and the torture and the drugs. Steve glosses over it in the way he glosses over everything traumatic in his life, like it was no big deal. A shared look with Nancy tells Billy all he needs to know – this is how Steve operates and Billy needs to be on the lookout for a breakdown later, after all this is over.

Billy can still sort of see the effects of whatever they had dosed Steve and Robin with. His pupils are shot to shit, the whites of his good eye are red, the whites of his bad eye are also red but from bursted blood vessels. He's blinking too slowly, his gaze keeps finding Billy's too often, and he keeps tilting his head towards Billy's neck, like he wants to just lay his head down on Billy's shoulder and close his eyes.

Steve's not swaying on his feet, he's not slurring his words, but Billy can tell that he's still not quite right. His attention is pulled away from Steve when Dustin's voice carries over to where they're sitting.

"If you want us to navigate, you got us." Dustin says to Hopper, confidently. "But we need a head start. And a car."

The Chief looks down at Dustin with narrowed eyes and a clenched jaw, but eventually relents. Hopper sighs, turns to their little cluster and gestures toward them. "Harrington."

Steve moves from Billy, though him and Robin follow along, as do

Jonathan and Nancy. A cluster of broken teenagers staring down the Chief of police. Steve looks at Dustin, who's staring up at him with wide, pleading eyes.

"You up for a drive?" Hopper tosses him a set of keys.

Keys that Billy catches because Steve's reaction time was slightly delayed from whatever is *definitely* still in his system. Billy hands them to Steve, reluctantly.

Steve sighs, looking at Dustin. "Where are we going, exactly?"

Dustin just smiles, then turns back to the rest of the kids to specify their plan. Billy turns to Steve, who's fiddling with the keys in his hands. He shoulders Steve softly to get his attention.

"You good?"

Steve blinked at him, nodded, then smiled a little. "Yeah, Hargrove. I'm fine."

Billy turned toward him fully, looking up right into Steve's eyes. "Are you good." He asked again, deliberately.

The small smile slid off Steve's face. Billy watched him take a deep breath and nod. "Yeah, I'm alright." Billy nodded back, even though he was still worried. "Are you coming with us?"

Billy looked from Steve, to where Max stood with the kids, listening to Dustin's plan. He felt torn. His instincts split in two. The louder one won out and Billy looked back up to Steve. "I can't." He sighed out. "I can't leave Max."

Steve nodded, understanding. "I get it."

Billy looked at him for a moment. Just... looked at him. At this stupid boy that had become someone important to him. Even swollen and bruised with dried blood flaking from his skin, Billy still found him pretty. Still wanted him.

"Don't do anything stupid, Harrington." Billy ground out, heart racing a little at the look in Steve's eyes. "No hero shit, you understand me?"

"Yeah, well, same goes for you." Steve smiled. "I know you're a *good* guy now but no need to try and one-up me and get yourself killed, okay?"

Billy snorted, shoulder gently checking Steve's. "Fuck off."

"Steve!" Dustin yelled, waving him over. "Let's go!"

Steve gave him one last look, fingers trailing gently over Billy's wrist in that very specific way he'd been doing since Billy's heat, before

walking out of the mall with Dustin, Buckley and little Sinclair. Billy watched them go with an ache in his stomach.

Max came and sat next to him, relaying the plan. Hopper, Joyce, and whoever the fuck this Murray guy was, were going to go down to the lab and close the gate while Dustin and Erica helped them navigate via the big radio. The rest of them would go wait it out at Murray's secret bunker.

Of course, as soon as they attempted to actually leave the mall, neither of their cars would start. Billy got out to check the engine and Jonathan followed suit. It was the ignition cable, one look at Jonathan told Billy it was the same with their car.

An engine revving caught their attention.

The Holloway's car sat thirty feet from them, headlight flashing on. And while they couldn't see in because of the lights, they knew it was Heather behind the wheel.

So back into the mall they went.

Mike stalked around on the walkie, attempting to contact Dustin and Steve, while everyone else attempts to flip the busted display car so they could grab the ignition cable. There's only one, but they'll all fit in the Wheeler's station wagon if they squeeze. Billy just wants fucking out of this mall, he'll come back for the Camaro when all this is over.

Then, the glass ceiling shatters, and the fucking Mind Flayer is dropping down from the fucking sky. Giant and grotesque and in the middle of the goddamn mall.

They get split up during the cave-in. Billy had grabbed Max and ran, Mike and El close behind. Billy has no idea which way the others went, and in the moment, he doesn't actually give a shit.

They're hiding behind a counter, Mike's walkie screaming from somewhere with Dustin's voice until the Flayer crushes it. They can hear the monster stomping around, slimy jowls dripping with every move. Mike darts up to look around and Billy hauls him back down quickly with a furious glare.

"It's turned away." Mike whispered. "If we go up the stairs now, we'll make it."

"No way!" Max whispered back, angrily. "Not with El's leg."

"We have to try!" Mike shot back.

"There's another way to get out." El looked at Billy, then to Max and Mike. "Through the *GAP*."

Billy looks from El, to Max, then to Mike. He sighs, tries to calm the racing of his heart. "Alright, fuck it." He nods at Mike to look again.

Mike pops up quickly before ducking back down. He nods at Billy, wide-eyed. "Okay, now!"

They take off and Billy grabs El, lifting her in a bridal carry to run faster. They rush through the *GAP* opening, Mike fumbling and knocking over a display. They rush in, as far back into the store as they can go and drop down behind a clothing rack. They stay as still as possible, El cradled in his lap, Max and Mike curled aggressively against his sides.

They could hear the tentacles slinking around the store and Billy nodded at them to shift to the next rack, slowly and quietly.

A balloon popping distracts the Flayer, enabling their escape. Billy grabs El quickly, carrying her out the back of the store, Max and Mike hot on his heels. They make it into the back room and Billy puts El down to kick open the door that led to the employee hallway. They're on a different side of the mall than *Scoops*, Billy doesn't actually know what leads where on this side, but he picks a direction and hopes for the best.

"This way, come on."

He carries El as they race down the white hallway, making turns and taking stairs until they get to a place that looks familiar. They push the door to the parking lot open and look around for the others. But the Wheeler's car is gone. The Holloway's car is on fire and Heather is rising from the ground beside it.

She's bleeding, but the blood is dark, black and thick looking. Dark

veins slithering under her skin. She's still in those athletic shorts from the Sauna, her hair a curly halo around her. She locks onto them immediately and Billy abruptly turns around and heads back for the employee door. Max manages to shut the gate behind them, but Billy knows it won't stop Heather for long.

They make it as far as the service elevator.

Max steps back into the hallway and Billy can smell her scent go sour. He puts El down and steps out into the hallway in front of Max.

Heather is walking toward them – dead eyed and demonic looking.

“Heather.” Billy tries, just once. Just to see if any recognition sparks in her eyes. “Stop.”

She doesn't stop. And nothing in her eyes indicates that she even *sees* Billy. That she's even capable of caring.

Billy makes sure he's covering Max and plants his fucking feet as she comes toward him. He's taken a lot of hits in his life, he's ready for whatever she'll throw at him. He can't let her get El or all of this was for nothing. He knows that, accepts it. He's ready to fight.

But Heather moves quicker than Billy had thought possible, faster than she should be capable. He pushes her back when she gets close enough, shoves her as hard as he can. She doesn't go far though, which is concerning. Heather's maybe a hundred pounds soaking wet,

she's small like Nancy – this thing must be giving her strength.

He throws a punch when she gets close enough again, but she catches his fist in the palm of her hand. She moves so fast that Billy didn't even have time to pull away before she brought up her other hand and snapped his forearm.

It's broken, Billy knows that from experience. His knees buckle and Max's screams. He goes down, breathing sharply through his nose. He sees Max charge at Heather, but one backhand sends her flying. Billy pushes himself up, breathing through the pain in his arm and reaches for Heather's hair, twisting his fist and pulling her back toward him.

Heather whirls around like it's nothing, like she can't even feel where Billy is certain he's pulling out her hair. She just shoves the shoulder of Billy's already injured arm hard enough to dislocate it. He goes down hard.

He can hear another body hit the floor. He can hear El screaming. He tries to blink the dark spots out of his eyes, tries to regulate his breathing so he won't pass out. He has to get up. He has to follow Heather. He has to get El.

Billy manages to sit up, he cries out from the pain, his arm limp and hanging at an odd angle. He's crying from the pain, he realizes, his face wet and hot. But he gets himself to his feet and tries not to move his arm too much as he does so.

Max has a nasty welt on her forehead. Billy checks her pulse with shaking fingers, she's alive. Mike is too. He leaves them, though his

body screams at him for doing it. He has to find El.

He follows the path the *Scoops*, because if Heather is taking El to the Mind Flayer, it doesn't really matter how he gets there as long as he ends up in the food court. The door is already open though, which means Heather had just been through here. Billy pushes out and watches as Heather places El down in front of the monster. She leans down to whisper something in El's ear and Billy takes his shot.

He shoots across the court as fast as he can while in this much pain and grabs Heather's hair again with his good hand. He uses the leverage to yank Heather off of El, throwing her to the ground. He sits on her chest, knees digging into her shoulders, pinning her. He fits his good hand over Heather's throat and squeezes.

He feels bad about it, can feel tears sliding down his face as Heather gasps for breath and struggles beneath him. But she hit Max and brought El to the monster, she was his friend, but he can't let her go.

Billy's vision is beginning to blur – both from the tears and from the pain. Heather is struggling beneath him, attempting to buck him off of her, but he holds tight. Until he's suddenly blinded by fireworks and Heather uses his momentary lapse to flip them.

Billy's injured arm and shoulder hit the ground hard, literally knocking the air out of him. His vision whites out as Heather puts pressure on his shoulder, growling over him as Billy gasps in pain.

The fireworks keep coming, deafening him, blinding him, and then the pressure on his injured side lessens and when Billy is able to blink

past the tears and see again, Heather is writhing on the floor in pain. El's head is turned toward him, but they're lying too far apart for Billy to reach out to her. She's crying, but she keeps eye contact with him until Heather manages to slither over to El and grip a hand around her throat.

El is speaking, but Billy can't hear her over the fireworks and the sound of his blood rushing in his ears. He watches though, watches as El reaches up and places a hand on Heather's cheek. Watches as Heather cries and closes her eyes. Watches as Heather stands up in front of the monster and *grabs* its claw with her bare hands.

Billy watches as Heather sacrifices herself to the thing that made her a monster.

He's passing out, he realizes. His vision is tunneling, he can't really hear anymore and what he can is distant and muffled.

Max is leaning over him, she's crying and bleeding from the wound on her head, but he can't hear her. He blinks, trying to wake himself up, but it's useless.

The last thing he sees before everything does dark is Steve dropping down beside her. He smiles to himself, because at least he's not alone.

Notes for the Chapter:

did I just squeeze the entirety of season 3 into one chapter? yes I did. season 3 is just sort of a skipping stone to the next part of the plot, which involves some things that we've all been waiting for...

8. Chapter 8

Billy wakes up in the back of an ambulance.

Max is beside him, crushing his good hand, tears and blood still dripping down her face. There's two EMTs – who look more like soldiers, if Billy's being honest – in the back of the cab with them. One of them leans over and shines a light in his eyes.

“Patient is awake. Pupils reactive.”

“Billy!” Max cries, leaning forward to look at him.

He turns his head to make eye contact with her, but he can feel one of the EMT's hands on his neck. “Max...”

“Sir, I'm going to need you to stay still.”

Slowly, sensation begins to come back to him. Billy blinks as he looks at Max, hoping that would dissolve the blurriness in his vision. There's a slight ringing in his ears that seems to dissipate very suddenly, bringing forth an onslaught of sound that's almost painful.

He can hear the siren of the ambulance, the beeping of some matching, the walkies attached to the EMT's uniform crackling with voices. Max is apologizing about something but it's too hard for Billy to concentrate as he becomes aware of the crazy amount of pain that

he's in, so he just squeezes her hand to let her know he's okay.

His shoulder feels like it's on fire.

Like someone had literally taken a molten blade and jabbed it through the muscle and bone. His forearm is a deep throb, an ache that's impossible to reach. It's all he can think about. He knows that he's clenching his jaw too tight, the pain in his head tells him so, but he can't stop. He breaths in through his nose and out through his mouth, just like he's always done.

Suddenly they stop moving and then there's a flurry of motion as they get him out of the ambulance. He loses Max's hand in the scuttle and instinctively calls out for her.

"Max."

The EMTs are talking over him, doctors suddenly surrounding him and asking questions. It's loud and too busy for Billy to keep track of. He yells again.

"Max!"

"Billy!" She calls out. But he can't see her.

He grabs one of the doctors with his good hand. Yanks the front of his scrubs so that he's pulled down to Billy's level. "My sister comes

with me.”

They’ve stopped moving, Billy realizes. The doctor Billy’s got by the shirt looks up at the others surrounding them before looking back down at Billy. “Mr. Hargrove –”

“It’s my arm and my shoulder.” He growls out, blinking past the pain. “You could set and cast that in your sleep – any fucking resident could. My sister comes with me or I’m walking out right now.”

Billy’s not entirely sure how convincing he sounds. He’s exhausted and in so much pain that even his fucking teeth hurt. He’s angry and sad about Heather. He’s sure the growl wasn’t very menacing, not with the tears clogging his throat.

But, the doctor looks at Billy and just nods. “Alright, Mr. Hargrove. Your sister can come with us.” He gestures and Max appears beside him, a nurse holding onto her shoulder like that would ever be enough to stop Max. “But if I find you need surgery, she’ll have to wait out here. Alright?”

Billy let the front of his scrubs go and moved his hand toward Max. She took his hand instantly, lifting his wrist up to rub across her throat as they walked the gurney down the hall. Max had never scented with him the way she was right now – fervently, desperately, like she was afraid he’d disappear. Her eyes were teary and red, and Billy could see that she looked dead-on-her-feet-exhausted. Like she’d drop any second.

They wheeled him into a patient room and the doctor – Parker,

according to his lab coat – began asking him some basic questions as they cut him out of his shirt. He shared a look with Max, unsure of how they were supposed to play this, how many secrets they were supposed to be keeping. Parker seemed to sense their reluctance and removed his hands from where he was touching around Billy's collarbone.

"We know about the entity." Doctor Parker said matter-of-factly. "Doctor Owens will be in to speak with all of you once he returns from the site."

"All of us?" Max asked with wide eyes. "Is everyone else here too?"

Parker nodded, returning to examine Billy's arm. "Yes, your friends will be arriving shortly. They took Mr. Hargrove first because he was unconscious when they arrived at the scene. But everyone will need to be checked over, especially those who have come into contact with the entity before."

"Will." Max breathed out, looking at the doctor.

"Mr. Byers and Ms. Hopper will be thoroughly examined, yes." Parker agreed. "But right now, let's focus on your brother. Mr. Hargrove –"

"Billy."

"Billy." Doctor Parker amended. "We need to take some x-rays so I can get a better look at this arm. Ms. Mayfield, you'll need to stay

here for this part, unfortunately.”

Max nodded but didn’t let go of Billy’s hand. “How long will it take?”

“Not long at all.” Parker promised. “Fifteen minutes, tops.”

She reluctantly released his hand and Billy felt the desperate urge to clutch Max close against his chest. “Stay right here, shitbird. Don’t move.”

Max nodded again, her hands folded awkwardly in her lap now that she wasn’t holding onto Billy. He watched her until they wheeled him completely out of the room, only then did he let out a heavy sigh and reach up with his good hand to rub at his eyes.

The x-rays took less than fifteen minutes, just like Parker had promised. They wheeled him back into the room and found Max surrounded by Dustin, Lucas, and Erica. They looked okay – shaken, and dirty-faced, and tired, but okay.

“Ms. Mayfield,” Doctor Parker addressed Max as he began setting up an IV of pain meds for Billy. “I’ll kindly ask that you all step outside for the moment. We need to set Billy’s arm now.”

Max opened her mouth, ready to fight and demand to stay, but Billy cut her off. “Maxine.” He gave her a look and she cut her mouth. “Where’s everyone else?”

Her shoulders slumped, her anger cut off as soon as Billy addressed her. “Owens is still looking at El and Will down the hall, Joyce is in there with them. Nancy, Jonathan and Mike are in the waiting room. Steve and Robin were admitted, like, two minutes ago.”

Billy nodded, “Why don’t you guys go sit with Nancy and Jonathan. You can come back in as soon as I’m done.”

Max chewed on the inside of her lower lip as she stared him down. She wanted to fight with him, wanted to tell him to *fuck off* and dig in her heels, but she wouldn’t. Not right now. So, she sighed, deeply, and nodded. Lucas grabbed her hand and gently tugged her out of the room.

“Alright,” Billy sighed. “Lay it on me.”

Doctor Parker had the x-rays up on the lightboard and turned back to Billy once the kids had left the room. The IV drip had started take effect, the pain not as bright or sharp, fading and dulled out. Thank fuck.

“Congratulations, Billy, you have an Ulnar fracture and a shoulder dislocation.”

“English, Doc.”

Parker gestured toward the x-rays that showed the break in his forearm. “Your forearm is made up of two bones – the one on your thumb side is the Radius and the one on your pinky side is the Ulna. Your break is on the Ulna side. A defensive fracture. We’ll set that and cast it, just as you described.”

“And my shoulder?”

“Simple dislocation.” Parker said casually. “As soon as your medication fully kicks in, I’ll set your arm and then pop your shoulder back into place. It will be very sensitive and sore for a while and you’ll have to keep it in a sling for at least a couple of days.”

Billy nodded, feeling himself relax for the first time since he woke up. No surgery.

He felt his eyes slip closed as Parker reached for the walkie and called the nurses in. He wasn’t sedated, he didn’t pass out or fall asleep, but the drugs mellowed him enough to let them work. He blinked his eyes open a few times as they casted his arm – black, he wondered if Max told them what color to use – and again when they sat him up to pop his shoulder back into place.

The nurses held him up as Parker lifted his arm and shifted it around and then sort of shoving it back into the socket. It didn’t really hurt, it just felt like a dull pressure, an absent sort of throbbing. They left not long after.

Billy laid with his eyes closed for a while, he wasn't exactly sure how long. When he opened them again, he could feel the pain in his body and his IV had been removed. Max was next to him, flipping through some random magazine.

"Hey." He sat up – still shirtless, he realized.

She perked up immediately, dropping the magazine and moving to his side. "You okay?"

"Yeah," He sighed, swinging his legs over the side of the gurney. "Yeah, I'm alright. They look you over?"

Max nodded, "While they were setting your arm." She had a bandage over the cut on her head, it would leave a nasty bruise. "No concussion, no stitches."

"Good."

Billy looked around for a shirt but couldn't find one. Max handed him a pair of folded scrubs. "Here. The nurse said you could wear this home. I can help you put it on."

Billy eyed the ugly blue scrub top, but it was better than nothing. He nodded, pulling the strap over his head but leaving his arm in the sling itself and putting that through the armhole first. Max helped

him pull it gently over his head, then his other arm. She pulled the sling strap back over his head once the scrub top was situated.

It was too big, the neck wide and gaping, the body baggy, but it would do. At least he wasn't shirtless in the middle of a spooky hospital.

"Where the hell are we?" He finally thought to ask – because they were certainly not at the Hawkins hospital.

Max shrugged, casually, like it was no big deal. "Some secret government facility."

Billy rolled his eyes as he pushed his feet into his boots, not bothering to lace them. "Seriously, Maxine."

"Seriously!" Max shot back. "I don't know where we are exactly – the last one got shut down after El closed the gate."

He sighed, rubbing a hand across his face. "Okay, fine." He looked around the room and realized for the first time that it didn't actually look all that much like a hospital room. Aside from the sink in the corner and the light box for x-rays, it just looked like a room.

Max's eyes were drooping a bit, obviously she hadn't rested yet. She had been too worried about him, he realized. So, Billy reached out, running his hand and wrist over her hair, watching as she visibly relaxed. "What do we do now?"

“They called our parents.” Max looked up at him from beneath her lashes – nervous, he realized. “Owens said he’s going to give them some story about the mall blowing up. He’s going to give them money for signing the non-disclosure agreement.”

“Did you guys sign something last time?”

“Yeah.” She nodded. “But Owens said that it’s more public this time, so now our parents have to be involved.”

Billy sighed, running his hand over his face, through his wild hair. “Neil’s gonna want to know why we were there.” He looked at Max seriously, she needed to know. “He probably won’t believe whatever cover story we try and sell him. We need to be prepared for that, okay?”

Max bit the inside of her lip and nodded. “I understand.”

Billy let his hand move from where it had been stroking Max’s hair to cup the back of her head. He looked deep into her eyes, made sure she absolutely understood that he meant every word he was about to say.

“I will never let him hurt you. Understand?”

Tears welled up in Max’s eyes at the words. She nodded, and Billy

knew in that moment that she actually believed him.

He let her go, leaning back out of her space and looking out of the open door. "Where's everyone else?"

Billy ignored the smell of her distress, of her unshed tears, and just followed Max out of his room, down the hall where the small waiting room was located. Everyone, save Steve and Buckley, were scattered around the small space. Joyce and Nancy were standing further down the hall, speaking to an older man in a white lab coat. Jonathan sat with a sleeping Will and El, Mike wrapped around them. Dustin was lying on the floor in front of Lucas and Erica. Lucas was asleep, while Erica attempted to toss M&Ms in Dustin's mouth.

Max moved to sit in the chair beside Lucas, Billy sat in the one beside her. It's quiet, Billy could just barely hear the soft murmurs of conversation from where Joyce and the man in the lab coat were talking. Max fell asleep pretty quickly now that she knew Billy was okay. She's slumped against Lucas's shoulder, breathing steadily deepening.

He nudges Dustin with his boot to grab his attention. "Where's Steve?"

"Him and Robin are detoxing whatever Russian shit was in their systems. We thought it wore off because they stopped being all loopy and giggly, but apparently they started crashing as the adrenaline wore off." Dustin sighed, looking genuinely put out. "They haven't let us see them."

Billy nodded, gaze already moving away from Dustin and back toward the man in the lab coat talking to Joyce and Nancy, then to where Jonathan was seated at the other end of the waiting room. There's no one else around – no nurses, no doctors, no patients. Hell, there aren't even any of those security guards Billy had seen when they first wheeled him in. Maybe Max was right, maybe they were in some kind of secret government facility.

He manages to slink away while Dustin is distracted by Erica tossing candy in his mouth. He finds Steve's room five doors down from the one Billy had been in, Robin in the room across the hall.

Billy slips in quietly, shutting the door silently behind him. Steve is sitting up in the gurney, face bruised to shit. It looks so much worse now than it did a couple hours ago at the mall, worse than what Billy had done to him last November. But he smiles when Billy enters the room, eyes wide as they raked over him.

"Hey." Steve breathed out, in relief, Billy realized. "You're okay."

Billy manages a smile back as he moves to stand beside Steve's bed. "Yeah, pretty boy, I'm okay."

"Thought I said no hero shit."

Billy shrugged, attempting to keep the prickle of unprocessed feelings about this whole thing at bay. "Figured if I was going to do this whole *good guy* thing, I might as well show you up while doing it."

Steve smiled a little, eyes bright and unfocused, but soft as they looked at him. He reaches out and taps his knuckle against the black cast inside the sling once Billy's close enough. "What'd they say?"

"Broken arm, dislocated shoulder." Billy said casually.

Steve huffed out a breathy little laugh, "Oh, is that all?"

His pupils are shot to shit, Billy realizes, and he still looks a little loopy. "Henderson said you and Buckley are detoxing from the Russian shit?"

Steve blew out a deep breath, it reminded Billy of when Steve was high. He got silly and unabashed in a similar way. "Yeah, man. They beat the shit out of me and then dosed us up with some truth serum shit. It honestly felt a like a *really* good high, until it fucking *didn't*, y'know?"

"You seemed fine earlier." Billy moved closer to Steve, coming to stand at the edge of the gurney close to his face, inspecting it.

Steve just shrugged, "I don't know. Owens said something about adrenaline? As soon as it was all over, I just sort of... crashed. They took some blood to figure out what the Russians actually gave us."

Steve was looking up at him with those dopey eyes, checking him over for any other injury, like Billy was hiding it from him. The blood was cleaned from Steve's face, but the bruises stuck out over his pale

skin. It kicked something in Billy, the sight of them making something coil and burst within him.

He couldn't stop himself from reaching out and pushing Steve's wild hair back out of his face. It was dangerous, because if Steve managed to remember this later, Billy would have a pretty hard time explaining it away. It was too *soft*, said too much. But Steve just closed his eyes and leaned into the feeling of Billy gently tucking his hair behind his ear, enjoying the small moment of comfort.

And then his eyes snapped open.

He grabbed Billy's wrist and brought it up to his nose, inhaling deeply.

Billy looked on confused – what the fuck was Steve doing? He had literally never once, in the all the time that Billy had known him, *sniffed* anyone.

"You smell different." Steve mumbled quietly pupils dilating and contracting in a way that was absolutely not normal. Looked downright fucking freaky, actually.

And Billy froze.

Because – when was the last time he had actually taken any of his meds? His suppressants? His *blockers*?

Days, he realizes suddenly. Not since he had dinner with Heather's family.

Fuck.

Steve was smelling Billy's actual scent for the first time. Smelling his *omega* scent.

Billy's world-altering panic allows Steve to tug his arm, which leads Billy to stumbled forward from the force of it. Steve doesn't hesitate, just leans forward and plants his face right in Billy's neck. Billy sort of stops breathing at the feeling of Steve pressing against his neck, lips brushing almost painfully against the skin. Steve's hand curls in the gaping neck of the too-large scrub top and fists the fabric, hauling Billy even closer to him. He's inhaling deeply, taking in lungfuls of Billy's scent, while huffing against his now incredibly sensitive neck.

Billy feels himself shiver at the feeling of Steve's nose and lips dragging over his skin, goosebumps pricking almost painfully. His eyes begin to flutter, his own breathing becoming a little ragged as his heart beats aggressively within his chest, hands fisted uselessly.

"Steve –" Billy whispers, his good hand clutching Steve's shoulder a bit too hard.

But Steve either doesn't hear him or doesn't care to, and just presses even further into Billy's skin, making these little punched-out noises that have Billy's dick going hard in his jeans. Fuck – it sounds like

what Billy imagined Steve getting fucked would sound like. He tries to breathe steadily through his nose, tries not to move or moan or do anything to trigger the omega response that's literally desperate to escape from his mouth.

And then... Steve gently *licks* over Billy's gland.

Billy's vision actually tunnels for a moment at the feeling, his hips snapping forward against the side of the gurney, his hand gripping Steve way too tightly, as a literal *whine* falls out of his mouth. His body is shaking from the feeling of Steve *licking* at his fucking neck, at his *gland*, and then Steve's breathing deeper, eyes completely glazed over – dazed and fucked out and absolutely not all there.

Billy feels like he's about to pass out. Like he's about to fucking climb on top of Steve in this fucking spooky government hospital and fuck him. He squeezes his eyes shut and grips Steve's shoulder and lets out another humiliating noise at the feeling of Steve mouthing over his skin –

And then, suddenly, Steve's gasping like he's in pain. Groaning loudly, body going taut.

He falls away from Billy's neck, back arching, head thrown back, veins bulging beneath his skin from the strain. His eyes are shut tightly, his knuckles white from where he's gripping the sides of the gurney. Groaning and whining in pain.

Billy moves without thinking, throwing open the door and shouting for help. He rushes back to Steve's side, confused about what the fuck

is happening – about what the fuck *just* happened – unsure of how to fix whatever this is, unsure of how to comfort Steve, especially while his skin is still pricking with goosebumps. But it's quickly pushed away as the man in the lab coat who was speaking with Joyce rushes in with a flurry of other doctors.

“Mr. Hargrove,” Doctor Parker says as he pries open Steve's eyes to shine a light into them. “We're going to need you to step outside.”

Steve groans loudly but reaches out and grips Billy's good wrist so tightly that Billy feels the bones shift. He looks up at the medical staff with a hard glint to his eyes. “Yeah, that's not happening.”

Parker looks at the man in the lab coat. *Owens*, Billy can see written cross the chest. So this was the mysterious Doctor Owens. Billy sized him up and decided he could take the man out, if necessary.

Owens stepped forward, calm in the flurry of activity surrounding them. “Can you tell me what happened?”

Billy flushes without meaning to, because the thought of Steve's face in his neck was honestly a little too much right now. But he keeps eye contact with Owens and lets Steve squeeze his wrist as he writhes in pain.

“I came in to check on him. He was fine, talking. Then he... scented me and started freaking out.”

He omits the licking for his own sanity. Billy's pretty positive that wouldn't be medically relevant anyway.

Owens moves toward Steve, checking his eyes, then his throat, finally his wrists. He sighs, rattling off a bunch of medical jargon too fast for Billy to comprehend. When he looks back to Billy and notices his confused look, Owens takes pity on him and explains.

"Mr. Harrington is presenting. Whatever is still coursing through his system is making him react badly. Think of it like an allergic reaction."

Billy stares at him sort of dumbfounded for a moment. "But... Steve's a Beta. He's already presented."

"Apparently not." Owens says as one of the nurses hands him a syringe and a small vial. "Late presentation isn't necessarily common, but it's not abnormal."

"This doesn't look fucking normal." Billy growled, wanting to do more to comfort Steve but incapable because of all the medical staff in his way. "What the fuck made him present *now*? The shit in his system?"

Owens just looks at Billy, accessingly, appraisingly, after gently jabbing Steve with the needle in his hand and then passing it off to one of the nurses. "Your scent, Mr. Hargrove."

Billy stilled, his heart stuttering for a moment. “What?”

“It happens more often than you would think.” He says off handedly as he steps out of the way so a nurse could start an IV. “A sign of a strong bond. Congratulations.”

Billy’s heart stutters in his chest, his face burning. He’s scared, he realizes. “But we’re not –”

“We really are going to need you to step out now, Mr. Hargrove.” Owens cuts him off.

Steve whines loudly and his grip on Billy’s wrist turns painful. Billy plants his feet and glares at the older man. “If Steve wants me to stay, I’m going to stay.”

Owens just looks at Billy before moving around the gurney to stand beside him. “Billy,” He begins gently, but firmly. “Mr. Harrington is going into rut. And according to the bloodwork we did when you were admitted, you haven’t had suppressants in your system for a few days. Now, if you don’t want to go into heat and be quarantined here for the duration, you need to leave. Now.”

Billy stares him down, but Billy can tell that Owens knows he’s scared. Billy can see it clearly in the older man’s eyes, that he knows that Billy doesn’t want to go into heat. He has Billy right where he wants him. His heart is pounding so fast, he feels lightheaded. He wonders if Owens can smell it, how anxious he is. Probably – since he doesn’t have any blockers in his system.

Billy sighs and turns to Steve, making the decision. He can't pry Steve's hand off his wrist with his arm in the sling, so he bends forward and talks softly over all the bustling.

"Steve." He pulled his arm a little to his attention. "Pretty boy, I've got to go."

Steve thrashed around, whining, crying out. Billy shushed him, conscious of the other people in the room watching him, listening to him. He managed to pull his wrist from Steve's hand and hold it instead, tracing his fingertips over Steve's skin and knuckles and fingers as gently as he could manage. He hoped it was soothing.

"Relax. You're fine." Billy said softly. "You're okay, Steve. I'm gonna go sit with the kids and you're going to be fine."

"Mr. Hargrove." Owens says firmly.

Billy pulls away from Steve, ignores his crying out and his grabby hands. He side-steps Owens and allows the doctor to take the spot he was in. A nurse practically drags him out of the room.

Everyone was gathered at the end of the hall – apparently Billy's yell for help and Steve's screaming woke everyone up. They look worried, scared, confused. Billy doesn't know what to tell them – what he's allowed to tell them. He doesn't want to out Steve in any way.

The nurse leaves him with the group and then... walks away. Billy watches her strut with purpose down the hall before he's pulled into the chaos of the kids asking him a million questions at once.

"What happened?"

"Is Steve okay?"

"What's going on?"

"We heard screaming."

Nancy and Jonathan give him concerned looks but say nothing. Joyce has her hands on Will and El's shoulders, but she looks at Billy with a sort of motherly affection that he doesn't really know what to do with.

"He's okay." Billy says eventually, talking over the kids' shouting. They settle immediately, listening to him. "He's having some sort of allergic reaction to whatever was in his system."

Dustin squinted at him skeptically, "How do you know that's what's happening?"

Billy glared back, "Because that's what Owens just fucking told me, shithead."

Dustin opened his mouth like he was about to argue back but Max elbowed him in the side. Dustin glares at Max, then pouts, put out. If Steve was here, he'd be rolling his eyes at Henderson's dramatics then trying to cheer him up. Billy just let out a deep breath and tried again.

"Owens said he should be alright. I don't know any more than that. They practically kicked me out of the room."

The nurse that had led him out of Steve's room returned just as briskly as she had left. She handed Billy a small paper cup with pills in it. There was no disguising what they were, and he knew exactly what they were for.

He felt himself flush, felt his hands start to shake with humiliation, as he took the little paper cup from her hand and swallowed the pills down, accepting the second little cup of water and chugging that as well. He didn't look at the group as he did it, he wondered if they had been able to smell him before now.

The kids would *maybe* be able to pick up his designation if they tried really hard – unpresented noses weren't very strong. But they would definitely be able to tell that his scent had changed, that it was stronger now, maybe even a little overwhelming since he was usually on blockers.

Jonathan and Nancy and Joyce – they'd be able to tell. They would *know*. Standing this close to him, they would know he was an Omega.

The nurse walked away once she was satisfied that he had taken the suppressants and wasn't about to go into heat, leaving him alone to deal with this. He felt his heart rabbit in his chest, eyes sort of locked to the ground.

"Please don't say anything." He asked quietly, shoulders wire tight. He felt Max lean her body against his good side as she glared at the group.

When he looked up, both Jonathan and Nancy had matching expressions of concern and pity. Joyce just looked at him with that same mothering concern as she reached out to pat him soothingly on the back.

"Billy, we would never say anything." Nancy pleaded.

Jonathan nodded, his gaze too earnest for Billy to look at for long. "Never."

Billy nodded back, choosing to accept their grace, trying to push away the humiliation and shame of his designation being outed like this. He looked down at the kids sort of surrounding him in a tight semi-circle.

"Same goes for you fucking goblins."

Dustin opened his mouth but shut it at Max's glare. "No one's going to say anything, Billy. We swear." She looked at each of them until

they all nodded or agreed.

Billy caught El's gaze as she nodded, "Friends don't lie."

El looked like shit.

The blood was cleared from face, as was most of the dirt and grime. But her eyes were bloodshot and red, her face puffy from crying. He wanted to reach out, try and comfort her in some way, but he felt awkward doing so.

So, instead, he nodded at all of them and moved to sit down in the waiting room chairs behind them. Max instantly followed suit and, surprisingly, so did El.

She moved to sit on his open side, looking up at him with those sad, tired eyes. She hesitated only for a moment before leaning forward to rest her head on his good shoulder.

"Thank you." She muttered, voice already clogging with tears. "For trying to save me."

"I'm sorry I didn't." Billy muttered quietly, uncomfortable with the emotions sitting in his chest.

About Steve, crying out for him in a room down the hall. About his busted arm. About *Heather* and the creature and everything they had

been through the last couple days. About how he was going to deal with his dad after all this. He felt tears prick at his eyes and was mad at himself for not being able to hold it together like he should.

Max's head turned sharply, and Billy knew she could tell he was upset. She looked between the two of them, her eyes wide and shiny. He felt El's shoulders shake a little.

"Dad is gone." She whispered and Billy felt his stomach drop. "He didn't make it."

Billy brought his arm up and wrapped it around her back. Max stood from Billy's other side, moving around to sit on the other side of El. She ran a hand over El's short hair in a soothing way Billy had seen Susan do to her. "I'm sorry." Billy muttered softly, to both of them.

El cried against his shoulder and Billy didn't know what to do. Fuck – what was he supposed to do?

Before Max, Billy had been an only child. An only child with an absent mother and a mean father. He'd been alone. Billy did not understand girls, especially girls at this age. He didn't know how to be kind, not really. He'd never been taught how to comfort anyone.

He must've looked lost because Max leaned forward and covered El's back with her small body, laying right over her, like she was shielding El from the pain. This brought her head right by Billy's, he gave into the urge and laid his head against the top of Max's, allowing them to soak in the comfort.

The boys stood around with wide eyes. Billy could see the panic flood Mike and Lucas' faces, like they were just as lost and adrift watching their girlfriends cry as Billy was. Will was the first to move, coming to hesitantly sit on Billy's other side, looking up at him with those wide eyes, before cuddling close. Will was careful of Billy's injuries as he snuggled in and Billy began to feel his breathing even out.

Dustin was the next to move, sitting on the floor in front of Will's legs and leaning against both him and Billy. He watched as Will brought his hand down to sink into Dustin's hair, Curley-cue going soft and pliant as Will played with his curls. Eventually Mike and Lucas joined Dustin on the floor, leaning against the legs of El and Max, Mike's long, bony body pressing into Billy's calf, head on Billy's knee as he ran a comforting hand up and down El's thigh.

Nancy and Jonathan sat in the chairs beside Will and Joyce looked on with wet eyes and a shaky hand pressed against her lips. It was an honest to god puppy-pile. Part of Billy felt claustrophobic, felt the anxiety crawling up his throat, threatening to choke him. But a bigger part of him felt soothed.

Billy had never really had friends growing up. He was too rough, too mean, too cruel. People didn't like being around him. When he got a little older, it was easy to be a bully, easy to charm his way into a party, into the good graces of the popular crowd. People respected power, strength – Billy had that in spades.

But friends? People who legitimately cared about him? Those were far and few in between.

So it was safe to say that Billy had never really engaged in friendly touches or embraces. It had always felt too *omega*, too soft or gentle for someone like him. For someone so hard and rough like he was.

And he knew that right now, the kids were exhausted and coming down from a fucking wild experience. He knew that they scented him and smelled comfort. Smelled safety and protection.

Because Billy had fought the Flayed. Had fought Heather up until the last moment. They had watched him do it. He had battled a monster and lived to tell the tale. He would protect them; he would keep them safe.

They were bonding to him the same way they had to Steve, Billy realizes.

Because Steve had protected them against *Billy*. Had gone down into monster tunnels with them and kept them alive. Had fought off creatures with his murder-bat and was ready to sacrifice himself to keep them safe.

It made complicated feelings swirl in Billy's chest. Because... Billy was not a good guy. Billy was not the hero in anyone's story. And yet – here he was. Cradling a crying girl as she wept over her dead father, surrounded by her friends, by her family, as they sought comfort in *him*.

Fuck, he wished Steve was here. Steve would fucking know what to say to the kids to make them feel better. He'd know what to do to help them stop crying.

Instead, Billy closed his eyes and let himself breath. Deeply, in and out, taking in their clean scents and attempting to rid the anxiety from his own now that they could properly smell it. They had to wait here – wherever *here* was, exactly – until their parents arrived. He could be comforting for a little longer and then have his massive freak out.

He just had to hold on a little longer.

Notes for the Chapter:

all of you have the kindest things to say and I appreciate every single one of you. things will definitely start changing for our boys as we move forward.

9. Chapter 9

So, as it turns out, Steve Harrington is a fucking Alpha.

Which means... Billy is royally fucking screwed.

Billy feels like he's been in a fucking haze since leaving the hospital.

Secret Government facility.

Or, whatever.

All of their parents had arrived not long after Steve's presentation and Billy's secret being outed. Billy tried really hard not to think about it with the kids surrounding him. Because without the blockers coursing through his system, they'd be able to smell any change in his scent. He especially tried not to think about it in Neil's presence.

At some point El had stopped crying. Max had just sat weaving little braids into her hair, while Billy absently twirled a fiery lock of Max's long hair around his finger as he watched the two of them. Max ignored it for the most part, her shoulders loose and easy, but every little while she would tuck her nose down into Billy's wrist to scent

him before going back to whatever she was doing to El.

Billy knew she was just scared and that she found him comforting – which, would have been a real fucking laugh before all this. But he was a little worried that she was getting too attached to it. To his scent. Because Billy had every intention of taking his blockers literally as soon as he got home. He had to, there was no other option.

He sighed and fought the urge to remove his hand from her hair and rub across his tired eyes. He'd talk to her about it later, after this was all over. Make her understand.

Billy had literally no idea what time it was, what day it was, where the fuck they even were. But, it felt like a long time since the mall, since they had gotten to... wherever this place was. Not long after Billy was hauled out of Steve's room and the kids collapsed into a pile around him, he saw Neil and Susan come down the hall. Owens had definitely waited to notify the adults until everything had been contained and covered up, Billy was certain.

Billy had tried not to let the spike of anxiety show in his scent at the sight of his father, but he could tell that Max had noticed the change immediately, shoulders going tense. Neil stared him down – eyes darting from Billy's casted arm in the sling, to Max's bandaged head, to the group of children literally lying on top of him.

Billy had let go of Max's hair.

Susan had looked terrified as she rushed forward and took Max into

her arms. Billy had kept his gaze down until Neil was standing right in front of him, only then did he look up to meet his father's gaze. The look was hard, and Billy knew they'd be talking about this later, when there was more privacy.

Billy had noted as they left the hospital, that Robin's parents were seated at her bedside, but Steve's were not. Billy wondered if anyone had called them – Owens had to of. Maybe they just couldn't make it back from wherever Mr. Harrington's business trip was this time. He tried to tamp down the overwhelming anger he felt at seeing Steve alone and sedated.

Billy didn't want to leave Steve. It actually physically hurt to walk himself out of the door with Neil's hand laying heavily on his good shoulder, but he had to. Owens wouldn't let him stay and it would be worse for him later with Neil if he made a scene. Especially over a boy. An *Alpha* boy.

So, they had piled into Susan's car without a word, Max pressing into him as soon as they slid into the backseat. They drove silently for a while, Susan sending worried looks at them through the rearview. It was morning, the sun too bright after being in the hospital and awake for like, twenty-four hours.

"I'm sorry I snuck out."

Max apologized without prompting. It sounded too loud in the quiet space of the car. She shot Billy a quick look before moving her gaze back toward the front, toward her mom and Neil.

“And I’m sorry that we got Billy involved. He was just trying to get me out of trouble, and I wouldn’t listen. None of this would have happened if I had just stayed home.”

Susan and Neil shared a look in the front seat, then looked at Max. “What were you even doing at the mall, Maxine?” Susan asked as firmly as she could manage, worry still lacing her tone.

Max stared into her mother’s eyes with an unwavering intensity that Max always had when she was trying to sell a lie. She looked appropriately guilty, upset, hell even bashful, but Billy would’ve been able to tell she was lying even if he hadn’t been there. “One of the older girls from school, her brother works at the movie theatre in the mall. She said she could get us in after closing to watch a movie.” Max shrugged, voice dismayed and pitiful. “But, when we got there... it was a prank. People setting off fireworks inside the mall. They think that’s what caused the fire.”

Neil appraised her for a moment from the rearview mirror before sliding his gaze over to Billy. “You know anything about this?”

“No, sir.”

“And what about the other kids that were there? The ones you go to school with.” Neil’s gaze narrowed.

“They were looking for their brothers, like I was looking for Max.”

"We didn't mean for anyone to get hurt." Max's lip trembled in an authentic way, pulling Neil's attention from Billy to her. Billy knocked his knee against hers in comfort. "I'm really sorry." She turned to Billy with actual tears in her eyes, an actual apology on her lips. "I'm so sorry, Billy."

His good side was toward the car door, so he couldn't reach over to comfort her like he wanted. But Billy nodded, pressing his knee in a bit harder against hers. "It's okay, Max." He said quietly. "I'm not mad at you."

Susan turned in her seat and reached a hand out to place on their knees. She had tears in her eyes, a rosiness to her cheeks that Billy could tell was because she was trying not to cry. "We're just glad you're both okay."

"We'll talk punishments later, Maxine." Neil said sternly from the front seat. "You're lucky you have a brother that cares about you."

Billy felt odd hearing those words fall from his father's mouth. Because, he didn't trust them. Didn't believe that his father thought he was blameless in this situation. Because he would do whatever it took to keep him from laying a hand on Max. Because, at the same time, he felt a warmth curl around him from the praise.

Disgusting, he thought to himself.

It turned out they hadn't been in Hawkins after all. The spooky secret government hospital had been two towns over, thirty-five minutes away. It wasn't a long drive by any means, but Billy was exhausted.

All he wanted to do was sleep. Then take a shower and maybe eat something. But mostly, he just wanted to sleep.

When they had pulled into the driveway, Susan was a flurry of activity. She helped Billy out of the car, held Max to her side as they walked up the drive, fussing over her only child. Billy's arm was beginning to ache, and his eyes were getting heavy. Neil stopped him on the doorstep with a hand curled around his neck. It didn't press, didn't clench, but Billy couldn't stop himself from tensing up at the feeling.

"Why can I smell you, Billy?"

He had kept his eyes down as he answered. "I forgot to take my pills when I went to find Maxine."

Neil held him there, staring down at him, for a moment, then two, before letting him go. "Make sure you take them."

"Yes, sir."

Billy shuffled into the house and into his room. He took his blockers before doing anything else. He pulled down his curtains and slid into bed and tried not to think about the last seventy-two hours.

Billy waited around to hear about Steve.

Steve – who is apparently an Alpha.

An Alpha that *Billy* triggered into presenting.

Fucking hell.

He ran a hand over his tired eyes and leaned back against his pillows. He had slept for two days. Literally two whole days after their release from the government hospital and he was still tired. His scent was back to normal and he no longer felt like he was dying, but his arm and shoulder were sore as shit and it was a pain in the ass trying to shower with a fucking cast. After he woke up from his days-long nap, he sat around for the following couple of days and just played that moment with Steve in his head over and over and over.

Once Billy was a little more functional, Neil had made him sit down, without Max or Susan present, and tell him what happened. He wanted to catch Billy and Max in a lie. He wanted to see if Billy would cover for Max, or worse – if Max was covering for him.

But Billy stuck to the story. Stuck to what Max had written on scrap paper and left under his pillow. It was the official story amongst the Party, approved and perfected by Dr. Owens. Billy didn't stray from the script and gave just enough attitude that Neil wouldn't suspect anything.

The absolutely wild part?

Billy wasn't the one grounded. Max was.

Max was forbidden from friends for two weeks. No phone, no skateboard, no arcade or D&D. She had pouted angrily but held her tongue. Because they both knew that it could've been worse, much worse.

So Billy sat around and felt like shit and thought about Steve Harrington *licking* over the gland in his neck. Thought about the black veins slithering beneath Heather Holloway's skin. Thought about a fucking meat monster as tall as a goddamn building. Thought about El crying into his shoulder over her dead father. He thought about a lot of things.

Mostly though, he thought about Steve.

Because while the mere notion of Steve Harrington presenting as an Alpha filled him with an aggressive anxiety that threatened to send him spiraling, it also made his dick throb almost painfully, made him fucking lightheaded.

Billy had been adamantly reminding himself all year that Steve was a Beta. Had been terrified that Steve would be able to scent his desire for him, his dirty, whiny, *neediness*. But Billy had been worried for nothing, because Steve wouldn't have ever been able to hone in on Billy's embarrassing crush, because he'd been *unpresented*.

And now... now Steve, as an Alpha, would be able to scent things he couldn't before. Would be able to scent *Billy*.

Sure, Billy was back on blockers, his Omega scent once again locked away from prying noses. But the unconscious secretions everyone made just by having emotions – Steve would be able to recognize those now. His nose would be sharper than ever.

Billy had to be careful. *Way* more careful.

But Owens words wouldn't leave his head – *a sign of a strong bond*. What the hell had that meant? Because it couldn't mean what Billy's heart hoped it did, there was just no way that Billy could ever be that lucky.

And, furthermore – did Steve know? Did Owens *tell* him? Tell Steve that Billy's scent had catapulted him into presenting? Did Owens tell him that it was *a sign of a strong bond*?

Billy honestly didn't know what was worse, Steve knowing or not knowing about it.

Because Steve knowing that was terrifying. But not knowing it might actually be worse.

Because it meant that *Billy* knew. That *Billy* was the one to bear the

knowledge that their compatibility was noteworthy. That *Billy* would have to keep this particular secret alone and fear Steve finding out.

Currently, Billy was lying on his bed, staring at the ceiling, and thinking about how much easier this all would have been if he had just made time during all the chaos to take his damn pills. It was the middle of the day, both Susan and Neil were at work. Billy was home with Max because she was grounded and also because he couldn't go back to the pool with his broken arm.

Not that Billy was ever planning to go back to the pool. Not after Heather. Not after everything that happened. He couldn't stand to see everyone so *normal*, going on with their summer like nothing ever happened.

So, he laid in his bed, sulking and moody, while Max watched the secret little box tv she had hidden in her room. Billy wouldn't tell, obviously, and it kept her from going full postal by not being able to talk to her friends. He was contemplating which tape to put on next when there was a knock at the door.

Billy hauled himself out of bed, lowering the stereo, and listened for another knock. It was tentative, shy, but it was there.

Max hadn't moved from her spot on her bed and Billy rolled his eyes as he moved to answer the door, knowing it was probably baby Byers or Sinclair hoping to stage a jailbreak while their parents weren't home.

He was absolutely not expecting it to be Steve.

Billy blinked, taking in the sight of Steve Harrington standing on his front porch. He looked exhausted, tired eyed and a little pale, but alive. He looked back at Billy, unsure.

“Hey.” Steve said quietly, taking in Billy’s bare chest and cast and shorts.

“Hey.” Billy breathed out, letting his own eyes run over the prominent bags under Steve’s eyes and the way his hair flopped around product-free. “You’re back.”

“Yeah,” Steve sighed, a slight curve to his mouth that spoke of a smile. “Last night.”

Billy stepped back, opening the door wider and letting Steve inside. As Steve stepped over the threshold, Billy realized that Steve had never been inside his house before. He had been in Steve’s room, in his *bed*, but Steve had never so much as knocked on his door.

“Is this... okay?” Steve asked quietly, standing in the living room as Billy shut the door behind him.

Billy’s brows furrowed for a moment at the question, but then understood that Steve was probably worried about Neil. Billy waved him off, “Yeah, Neil’s not here.”

Steve hesitated, then gave a nod, and Billy realized that maybe that wasn't what he had meant. But before Billy had a chance to think on it, Max darted down the hallway and wrapped Steve in a hug.

"Steve! You're back!"

Steve smiled and didn't hesitate in hugging her back. "I am." He nodded then turned to look at Billy. "I called Dustin last night, thought word would've gotten around."

Billy shrugged his good shoulder, "Max doesn't have her walkie."

"I'm grounded." She pouted angrily.

Steve bit back a smirk. "I'll call Billy next time, promise."

Max nodded seriously. "You better." Then softened, "You're okay, though? They kept you for a long time, longer than Robin. Billy said you had an allergic reaction to the shit in your system?"

Steve shot a look at Billy as he opened his mouth to answer. "Uh, something like that." He nodded, running a hand through his hair. "I'm okay now, all flushed out."

"Good." She nodded before swaying a little closer, nose crinkling. "You smell different."

“I do?”

“Yeah.” Max eyed him suspiciously. “No bad, just... different.”

Steve stole a glance at Billy, who had been absolutely silent during this particular exchange, heart thumping oddly in his chest. “Probably from all the top-secret shit in my blood. Nothing to worry about, Mad Max.”

Billy knew that Max didn’t believe him, but thankfully the exhaustion in his eyes and the slump to his shoulder made her take pity. The phone started ringing and Max shot back to her room to answer it, when she didn’t immediately call for Billy, it was safe to assume that it was either Lucas or El.

He shook his head and looked back at Steve, who had immediately shifted his gaze away to look around the room in a way that was universal for *I wasn’t looking at you, I swear*.

“Come on, pretty boy.” Billy walked past Steve and pushed into his bedroom. “You look about ready to keel over.”

Steve followed behind him, stopping in the doorway to take a deep breath, eyes skating around. Billy sat down on his messy, unmade bed, and tried not to pass out from the sight of Steve Harrington among his things. He wondered if Steve could smell traces of his scent still lingering in the room, or if the warm breeze from the window fan had taken it all away. Billy wasn’t sure which one he was

hoping for, exactly.

Billy expected Steve to sit on the small couch by the door, but once he had actually entered Billy's room, Steve had moved to take in the room the same way Billy had done to his months ago. Hands shoved into the pockets of his jeans, thin t-shirt stretched tight across his broad shoulders, as he bent to look at the records and cassettes in crates by his stereo.

"You got home last night?" Billy asked when the silence started making him itchy.

Steve stood from his inspection of Billy's modest music collection and turned to face Billy, eyes still tired, still roaming, like he was trying his hardest *not* to look at Billy. Which, was when Billy realized that he was still shirtless and Steve was actively trying not to look at his bare chest. It'd be weirder now if he struggled to put on a shirt, because that had implications. It acknowledged that Billy knew Steve was looking at him, that Steve was uncomfortable with Billy being so bare. So, Billy did what he did best and just ignored it.

"Yeah," Steve sighed out.

Billy's brows furrowed, "You were there for a long time."

They were dancing around the *thing*. The questions Billy really wanted to ask hanging in the air between them. Steve looked strung out, like he was coming down from a bad trip. And when Steve reached up to tuck his floppy, shiny hair behind his ear, Billy realized he'd stuck his hands in his pockets because they were shaking.

“They had to sedate me.” He shrugged – not shrugging it off, more like *it is what it is*. “Whatever was in my system was fucking with the presentation, so.”

Billy let out a breath he hadn’t been aware he was holding. “They told you, then?”

Steve looked up then, meeting finally meeting Billy’s eyes for the first time since stepping into his room. His lips lifted slightly in a smile, “Well, yeah. They sort of had to.”

And, duh. Of course they would tell Steve that he had presented and that he wasn’t the Beta like they had all thought. Like, obviously.

Billy wanted to ask – *what else did they tell you?* But that would be talking about the thing that hung between them and like fucking hell Billy was going to be the one to bring that up first. Not when he didn’t know what Steve actually remembered.

So, instead, he swallowed and nodded. “Must suck, man.”

And then Steve let out a harsh breath, leaning his head back to look up at the ceiling as he nodded. “Yeah.” His shoulders were slumped, his hands shaky. “It does.”

“You wanna talk about it.” Billy found himself saying while warning

alarms went off in his head.

Steve ran his hand through his hair again and sighed. "I don't know." He said quietly.

"Sit down." Billy caught Steve's eye and tried not to let his scent bloom with how tired and sad Steve looked. "You look seriously fucking warped."

And, once again, Billy thought Steve would sit on the very open couch opposite Billy's bed. Once again, he was wrong.

Steve moved from his spot in the middle of the room and came to sit next to Billy. On the bed. On *Billy's bed*.

It shouldn't be that big of a deal – wouldn't have been before summer. Billy had lounged on Steve's bed, had Steve fall asleep on him in Steve's bed. This should be no different. Except it was. Because Steve now knew that Billy was an Omega. Because now Steve was a fucking *Alpha*. Because Owens had said they showed signs of a *strong bond*.

But Billy said nothing. Didn't move from the spot as Steve sat down gently beside him, eyes downcast, hands wringing together. This close, Billy could smell him very clearly. His scent had changed, but only in the sense that Billy could now tell his designation from it. Steve's scent had always been potent – which, is medically wild considering that he had actually been unrepresented – but now it hit Billy like a wall, invaded his senses aggressively. Billy had to literally blink himself back into reality to clear his head.

Steve looked like he wanted to say something. The wringing hands and the way he chewed silently on his lower lip clued Billy in, the way he kept his tired gaze on Billy's floor confirmed it.

So Billy pressed his shoulder into Steve's, nudging him, grabbing his attention. Steve looked up, startled almost, eyes big and wide. Billy's brow furrowed, "Are you okay? Like, seriously?"

And Steve looked at him with those big eyes, hands trembling like he'd gone too long without a fix, and Billy felt the most overwhelming urge to sooth him. To kiss that slightly scared look away from his face. But then Steve opened his mouth and started talking – breathless and quick, like he was afraid he'd never get it out, like he was afraid Billy would stop him.

"I... I don't know." He gave a jerky shrug. "I just, I woke up in the hospital and they told me what happened, and my parents were actually there, which was weird." He swiped a hand through his silky hair again, nervous as he fumbled through his words. "I called Dustin after I got released last night because... because I knew the kids would be worried. But... but all I really wanted was to call you. To see you." Steve ducked his head at the admission, like it would make him weak in Billy's eyes. "I-I just, I feel like everything's wrong. Nothing feels right, nothing *smells* right. I feel like I have no idea what the fuck's going on."

Billy could hear the way Steve's breathing began to wheeze and the way the words sounded tight coming out of his throat, so he reached over and grabbed Steve's wrist. "Calm down."

Steve whined and Billy realized his mistake, quickly taking his hand away. Because before, Steve hadn't been anything, so the touch to his glands on his wrist might feel pleasant but ultimately meant nothing. But now... now that was definitely not the case. Especially after he just admitted to his senses being on overdrive. Billy was an idiot.

But Steve followed Billy as he pulled his hand back, shoved further into his face, pupils dilated, breathing a bit heavy. He pressed his side fully against Billy's skin, face closer than it had ever been. "I just," He whispered, voice shaking. "I need..." He swallowed thickly and Billy could see the bob in his throat. "Can I scent you?" He asked desperately. "Please?"

Billy's heart was beating so fast, he honestly thought he might be having a heart attack. Because Steve was in kissing distance and his scent was so intense and so *desperate* and he was pressed against him on Billy's bed. So, he swallowed thickly and nodded.

Steve all but dove into his bare neck, just like he had at the hospital. Billy's skin literally stung from how quickly he broke out into goosebumps. Steve's nose was pressed right under his jaw, his lips absently dragging over the fragile skin of his neck as Steve sucked in deep lungfuls, chest expanding against Billy's good arm.

Billy felt Steve's body immediately settle, but then he whined right in Billy's throat. Billy's response was immediate, he tilted his head further back to give Steve room, his free hand reaching up to sink into Steve's soft, product-free hair as his dick jerked in his shorts.

And – *fuck*.

God fucking dammit.

He had just literally *bared his throat* for Steve. For an *Alpha*.

Billy had never done that willingly before.

And Steve was a fucking baby Alpha at that. Steve had literally no power or sway over anything yet, and here Billy was, head tilted from one pathetic whine.

Billy knew that it was because he liked Steve. Because he was a little in love with Steve. But it still rubbed him raw that he'd done it so willingly, so *easily*.

"You don't smell the same." Steve whined again, pressing harder into Billy's neck like that would make the scent stronger somehow.

Billy swallowed and knew that Steve could feel it. "Because I'm back on blockers now." Steve made that pathetic little noise again and Billy subconsciously shushed him by tugging gently where his fingers were buried in the back of Steve's hair. "You'll have to wait until my heat hits."

And someone should just come and put Billy out of his misery.

Why the fuck did he just say that? Like, why did those words choose to come out of his mouth? Could he sound any more desperate and

needy? Jesus fuck, what was wrong with him?

But before Billy could contemplate driving himself off the quarry, Steve jerked back, pulling away so fast that Billy barely had time to blink before he was face to face with a shocked Steve Harrington.

“You’re an Omega?”

Billy felt his stomach drop, felt ice water begin to pump through his veins, felt cagey and tense. He had just assumed that Steve *knew*. Assumed that he remembered what had happened at the hospital or that Owens had told him how he had presented. It was a stupid, embarrassing thing to say, but Billy had only said it because he thought that Steve *knew*.

His scent must have been doing something wild because Steve reached out without thinking and grabbed his wrist in the same way Billy had done to him earlier, the same way Billy had done to him the night of his early heat. It calmed him somewhat, he had to admit, but even Steve’s gentle touch wasn’t enough to stave off the swirl of actual terror and anxiety within him.

“I thought – I thought you knew.”

Steve shook his head, but Billy didn’t miss the way his pupils expanded further, making his eyes look completely black, or the way his scent bloomed with something heady. “Owens just said your scent.” Steve licked his lips and Billy couldn’t help but track the motion. “Does everyone else know?”

“Yeah,” Billy sighed, ignoring the urge to cross his arms tightly over his chest, ignoring the itch to growl and break something. “Kind of hard to keep that secret when the fucking apocalypse kept me from taking my pills.” Billy tore his gaze away from Steve’s, jaw tight, fist clenched. “Before, only Max knew.”

“I never would have known.” Steve said softly, warm body still pressed against Billy’s side.

Billy could feel Steve’s gaze on his face, knew a flush was settling over his skin from humiliation, from anger. He pushed himself off the bed and away from Steve before he did or said something he would regret.

“Kinda the point, Harrington.”

“Please don’t do that.” Steve said softly, voice even quieter than it had been. Billy turned from where he had moved toward his dresser, watching as Steve fisted his hands in his jeans. “Please don’t be like that to me right now.”

Billy let out a deep breath, running the hand not trapped in a sling over his face and then through his messy hair. “Sorry.” He muttered, leaning back against the dresser, facing Steve. “I’m not good at... being *nice*.” He sighed, “Maybe you should’ve gone to see Nancy or Jonathan.”

Steve’s head snapped up, his bottom lip jutting into that angry pout. “I don’t want to see Nancy or Jonathan.” He said easily. “I wanted to see you.”

Billy felt his heart pound off rhythm at the words and ignored the pressure that began to sit in his chest. He swallowed and nodded slowly, tearing his gaze away from Steve. "Okay."

"And you *are* nice." Steve continued, just as firm. "In your own way."

Billy snorted, smiling a little and shaking his head. "That's code for *asshole*, Steve."

Steve rolled his eyes, "I'm not calling you an asshole. I'm saying that you're nice in a way that not everyone can appreciate. And you're plenty nice to me."

"Now." Billy found himself correcting, unable to let himself, or Steve, forget just how he used to be.

Steve caught his eye and nodded. "Now." He agreed, meaningfully. "But that's what matters. I mean, fucking hell, Billy, you literally saved El's life – all of our lives." Steve shook his head. "You're not that guy anymore. You haven't been for a long time."

Billy felt his eyes sting at Steve's words, in the gentle but firm tone he'd said them in. Like he believed them, like he believed that Billy had changed. That Billy was *good*. He wasn't going to cry in front of Steve, especially not after admitting to being an Omega. But, it was hard to keep himself from breaking down at the kind words and soft tone. Billy didn't have a lot of kindness in his life and hearing Steve say those words after everything was just... a lot.

So he nodded, letting Steve know that he heard him, eyes pinned to the floor as he tried to push away the tears that threatened to gather and fall. He heard Steve stand from the bed and begin to slowly make his way over to Billy. He looked up when Steve got close enough, eyeing the manic sort of look on his face, the desperation that radiated from him.

“I know we don’t really do this,” Steve began hesitantly. “But... can I hug you?”

And – Billy got it. Understood what Steve meant by *this*. They were both sort of performatively affectionate – a slap on the back, arms around shoulders, a nudge or elbow to get attention. But Steve was actually physically affectionate, or craved it anyway. Billy saw how he was with the kids, how he’d been with Nancy before their breakup.

Billy might not understand the desperation for physical contact, mostly because his whole life had been one big definition of the phrase Bad Touch, but he could absolutely recognize that Steve craved it. And Billy was not like his father – or, at least, he was trying really hard to not be – he wasn’t about to deny Steve comfort when he could very easily help him.

So Billy nodded as he looked into Steve’s exhausted and uncomfortable eyes. “Yeah. Yeah, you can hug me.”

Steve moved slower this time. He didn’t dive into Billy headfirst like he had during the scenting. No, he stepped closer, giving Billy enough time to wiggle out if he wanted, before he ducked down and

curled himself into Billy's body.

There was barely a difference in their height, but Steve managed to make himself small as he lowered his face into Billy's good shoulder, arms going around Billy's ribs and back to avoid hurting his injury. Billy gently wrapped his arm around Steve's shoulders, hand sinking into the back of Steve's warm hair.

He felt Steve's breath hitch, felt the shiver slide down his spine, felt the way he gripped at the bare skin of Billy's back. Steve sank into him, pressing Billy back gently against the dresser, breathing deeply until his shoulders started to shake.

Billy knew Steve was crying even before he felt the wetness drip across his collarbone. He held Steve a little tighter and blinked back his own tears as they resurfaced. He didn't know how to deal with someone like Steve – someone who didn't cry, someone who wasn't an emotional hurricane like Billy often was. Steve kept everything tightly bottled, kept it to himself. Because, Billy was realizing, Steve didn't want to burden other people with his problems. Because, like Billy, he'd been taught his feelings weren't worth much.

Billy might not understand Steve, but he did understand this.

So he held Steve's body against his own and let him silently cry. He didn't murmur comforting platitudes or give him a condescending pat on the back. He just held Steve, fingers running gently through the back of his soft hair, and blinked back his own tears.

Eventually, Steve settled, face hot and wet turned into Billy's neck

instead of his shoulder. Steve took in whistling breaths through his nose, eyelashes tickling Billy's sensitive skin. Then, after a while, he pulled away.

Steve's face was angled down as he brought a hand up to rub across his eyes and cheeks – ashamed, Billy realized. Steve was ashamed.

And, that just didn't sit right with him. Made him angry that Steve felt that way. Because *Billy* often felt that way after he had once again cried in front of Neil. So, he moved forward and gave Steve a hug of his own.

It was brief, but meaningful. Or at least Billy hoped it was. Cheek against Steve's, nose titled down just enough to get a hit of that scent straight from the source, arm thrown around his shoulders to holding him in place.

Steve barely hesitated before wrapping Billy up again, squeezing him tight, but not desperately like before. Billy let himself linger only long enough for his message to be clear, hoping Steve understood. And to scent Steve the way he'd been desperate for. Billy had never scented an Alpha before, not like this, not purposefully. It made him shiver as he pulled out of Steve's arms.

They looked at each other quietly, Steve's face was red from crying and Billy was sure his own eyes were shiny from trying to hold back his own tears. But they had been through a lot, so Billy tried really hard not to let the shame of being emotional settle over him like it might've usually. Steve didn't deserve to feel like there was something wrong with him for being upset.

“I’m glad you’re okay.” Steve said eventually, voice soft and quiet.

Billy just looked at Steve, heart pounding oddly in his chest and stomach in knots at the tone in Steve’s voice. Before Billy could open his mouth to reply, Steve’s head turned and tilted down, listening to the music that had been playing lowly in the background. Billy hadn’t been paying attention, but now he could hear it – *Yesterday* by *The Beatles*. He’d forgotten that he had put this song on the mixtape in a fit of melancholy.

There was a pensive line between Steve’s eyes as he listened to Paul McCartney sing – *Suddenly, I’m not half the man I used to be – There’s a shadow hangin’ over me – Oh, yesterday came suddenly* – head angled down toward the ground, eyes distant.

“I didn’t know you listened to *The Beatles*.” Steve said still with his head leaning toward the speakers.

Billy swallowed, eyes tracing over the pensive look on Steve’s face. “There’s a lot of things you don’t know about me.”

Steve turned back to look at him. Pretty doe eyes running over his face, accessingly, searchingly. McCartney crooned gently behind them, the air between them felt thick and charged with something Billy wasn’t even going to try and put a name to. And then, it was over.

He heard Max tromp down the hall and turned his head toward the door before she appeared in the open doorway. She gave Billy an eyebrow with attitude and he narrowed his gaze at her before she

even opened her mouth.

“Um, are we going to eat lunch or what?” She asked snottily in a way that only tweens were capable of. “I’m literally starving.”

Billy rolled his eyes and looked toward Steve in a *can you believe this shit?* sort of way but found Steve smiling softly at him instead. “Yes, Maxine, we’ll get lunch.”

She aggressively rolled her eyes but didn’t stomp out of his room like he used to, so Billy was considering that progress. He looked back at Steve, intending to ask him if we wanted to buy them some pizza, but stopped at the look he saw still on Steve’s face. That soft, little smile and gentle, tired eyes. He felt himself start talking before he could think otherwise.

“This isn’t going to change shit between us, right?”

Steve blinked at him, a little startled. But Billy needed to know, needed to make sure that Steve wasn’t going to change now that he’d found out Billy was an Omega. Billy honestly wasn’t sure he could bear it.

“Of course not.” Steve shook his head and looked at Billy seriously. “You’re... *Billy*. Your designation doesn’t change that.”

Billy nodded, sort of absently as he let Steve’s words slide over him. “Okay. Good.” He looked back into Steve’s eyes. “So, you gonna buy

us some pizza or what, rich boy?”

Steve snorted and a genuine smile cracked over his face. “Yeah, I’ll buy you some damn pizza, Hargrove.”

Billy tried to curb his own smile and hoped that Steve’s words would ring true, that things really wouldn’t change.

10. Chapter 10

He swallows down another cup of shit beer and tries to ignore the echoing sounds of the party surrounding him.

He's leaning back against a tree, staring unseeingly into the large bonfire that takes up the middle of the clearing, ignoring the sounds going on around him. Billy has absolutely no idea whose party this is, doesn't care either. All he gives a shit about right now is getting loaded and quieting his brain for at least a little while.

Because he can't stop thinking. Can't stop remembering.

It started after Steve stopped by his house. Even before that, if he was being honest with himself. He'd been stuck in his room, in his house, since the mall. Stuck with Neil's unreadable gaze and too-hard grip. Stuck with Max's unusual quietness and the scent of Steve on his sheets, in his nose.

It had been of his own making, and he knows that. Because, even now, Billy doesn't actually want to be out here. Doesn't actually want to be around anyone, and he certainly doesn't want to fucking talk to anybody. But Billy's got this itch under his skin that he can't quite scratch, a gaping, clawing, desperation in his chest that's just *begging* for something that Billy can't fill.

Because his friend is dead. And Steve's an Alpha now. And his dad is more suspicious than ever.

Billy wants the ocean. He wants the sand and the harsh sun and salty seawater that stings his eyes. He wants his mom. He wants Steve to tell him that he's good again. Billy wants a lot of things that he can't have.

So, instead, he drinks.

Tommy had called earlier in the night with a *Hargrove, man, you dead or something? No one's seen you at a party in weeks!* And that had been that.

Indiana got cold at night in the summer. California did too, but it was a different sort of chill. Everything was different. He had shrugged on a hoodie over his t-shirt and hadn't even really bothered with his hair, which he could tell people took notice of. Because this was not the Billy Hargrove that they were used to, not the asshole they had all come to tolerate and adore.

He couldn't bring himself to care.

He had just taken off the sling maybe two days ago, shoulder still sore to the touch but no longer needing to be elevated the way it had. He could feel it now, the ache, his arm not used to hanging at his side again yet. It felt odd, the dull pressure in his shoulder, the twinge of pain beneath the plaster of his cast. Weird, but known. Because this was a known pain, because Billy had broken his arm before.

That made it easier to ignore, made it easier to push the pain away, just like he'd been doing his whole life. The beer was also helping.

He had ditched Tommy and Carol almost immediately with absolutely no regret and no care, grabbing a drink and heading off to a section of the clearing that was empty and sort of quiet. He ignored everyone that he had passed, face closed off and mean, body prowling like he was ready for a fight.

Billy had settled against a tree on the outskirts of the party, drinking himself to a comfortable numb. He watched his classmates laugh around the bonfire, talking and dancing. Someone had their car stereo playing some preppy mix that Steve would probably dig.

He sighed. *Steve*.

What the fuck was he going to do about Steve?

Because Steve had had wanted to see *him*, Billy, of all people. Because he bought them pizza and sat in their shitty kitchen and ate it right out of the box with them. Because Steve had *hugged* Billy, had cried. And Billy was convinced no one else in the Party had ever seen Steve cry. Because Steve had been triggered into presenting because of *him*.

Billy *wanted* – fuck, did he want.

Wanted to claim Steve as his, wanted to kiss that pretty mouth and tangle his hands in that pretty boy hair. Wanted to fuck Steve into the goddamn ground and then drape across him all soft and sweet afterward. He wanted to hold his fucking hand.

He wanted a lot of things. A lot of seriously unobtainable things.

Because it didn't matter that Steve was an Alpha. Didn't matter that they had a *strong bond* or whatever. Didn't matter.

Because Steve was his friend.

Because Billy didn't get to have the things he wants.

Because Neil wouldn't let him.

So Billy sat there alone for a while, sulking and drinking and only getting up to grab more beer. People tried talking to him at first, but they weren't stupid. The kids of Hawkins wanted his attention because he was shiny and new and proved himself a worthy king, but they were also afraid of him. It was that spark of danger that tickled them pink, that made Billy Hargrove *so exciting*. It's what also granted him the ability of shrugging people off without a fight. Just part of the Hargrove charm – no one ever knew if they'd get a smirk or a bite.

“Hey.”

Billy sighed but turned to look at Steve as he sidled up to him, concern written all over his pouty expression, eyes darting around the woods, searchingly.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were coming tonight?” Steve asked as he settled beside Billy.

Billy shrugged, dismissive. He knows that Steve can tell by the gesture that he’d rather be left alone. He also knows that Steve won’t be deterred by it either. Not anymore.

“We’re not attached at the hip, princess.” Billy finished what was left of his beer, tossing the can. “Don’t have to do everything together.”

Steve’s brow furrowed as he looked Billy over. He was quiet as he fiddled with the unopened can in his hand, gaze never leaving Billy. When he spoke, his voice was careful.

“Are you mad at me?” He asked hesitantly. “For your room?”

For the hugging and the crying, Billy heard the words unsaid.

Billy rolled his eyes. “No, Steve, I’m not mad at you.” Because he wasn’t. He wasn’t mad at Steve, he was just... mad.

“Then what’s wrong?” Steve pressed.

“Nothing.” Billy bit back before closing his eyes and sighing. “I’m just... tired.”

Steve eyed him for a moment before sighing. "Alright."

They were quiet for a moment, the sounds of squealing teenagers and shit music loud over the silence of the woods. Steve continued to search the perimeter of the forest with shifty eyes, he fiddled with his beer can for another moment before reaching into the pocket of his thin bomber jacket and pulling out his keys. Billy watched as he punctured the bottom of the can, fitting his mouth over the hole and popping the tab all in one fluid motion.

Billy watched Steve Harrington effortlessly shotgun a beer and he had never felt more turned on in his life.

He eyed the pale column of Steve's throat as he swallowed deep pulls from the can, head tipped back *just* so. Steve tossed the can when he was done, casually swiping at his mouth with a thumb.

What an asshole. Billy wanted to kiss him so fucking badly.

Billy chugged the rest of his cup and pushed off the tree he was leaning against. "Come on, pretty boy. Let's go get more booze."

Steve followed him, which Billy had been counting on, but still gave him a little thrill anyway. They wove around party goers, ignoring calls of their names and wandering hands. The closer they got to the keg and the piles of alcohol loaded onto a lone folding card table, the louder the music and people became.

Billy already sort of had a headache and his tolerance for other people wasn't really getting better with each drink like he had hoped it would. But Billy wasn't a quitter and he had decided early in the night that he wasn't leaving this stupid party until he was wasted enough not to think about anything that had been bothering him. So, he reached for the keg and filled up his cup, handed it to Steve, grabbed another and filled that one too.

Steve was sipping at the frothy beer and Billy had to literally tear his gaze away as Steve licked his lips. Alcohol in his system and Steve Harrington didn't tend to mix well, as history had proven, but it seemed to be even harder now that Billy knew what Steve smelled like, knew what his lips felt like on his fucking neck. *Chill the fuck out*, he reminded himself sternly.

Billy wanted to go back to his spot on the edge of the clearing, get away from all the noise and people, but when he refilled their cups a second time, Steve was stuck in conversation with some girl. Billy didn't really want to leave Steve with some other Omega chick, didn't really want to leave Steve at all despite his less than warm welcome earlier, so he waited. Sipped at his beer and stuffed a can or two into the pocket of his hoodie for later while glaring at the girl flirting with Steve.

He was busy looking at Steve's fucking movie star hair and the slope of his long neck and the width of his shoulders as he sipped his beer. Noting how he seemed detached from the conversation with the chick and her friend, how... *unalive* he looked while talking to other people that weren't in their little monster group.

And then Tommy appeared at his side before he could finish the

thought and slapped a hand on his back in greeting, grabbing at his shoulder in a friendly embrace. His fucked-up shoulder.

“Hey man! We’ve been looking all over for you –”

Billy gasped. He hadn’t meant to, but he’d been engrossed in Steve and Tommy had startled him and the pain that radiated down his body made his teeth ache.

He blinked and suddenly the pressure was off his bruised shoulder and Steve had Tommy pressed into a tree, growling. Like, honest to god *growling*.

Carol was standing beside them, pushing at Steve’s shoulder. “Steve, get the fuck off him! Steve!”

People were staring, and whispering, and Billy’s shoulder hurt, and Steve was *growling*. Tommy looked up at Steve, hands trying to pry Steve’s forearm off his collarbones, yammering angrily about chilling out and how he hadn’t meant to hurt Billy.

And Billy moved without thinking.

Tossing down his cup and stomping quickly over to Steve. He grabbed the back of Steve’s neck and pulled him off of Tommy, ignoring Tommy’s confused and annoyed yells, and Carol’s curses, and the eyes of all their peers. Steve let Billy steer him out of the clearing and away from the party, let Billy grip his neck tightly and

push him where he wanted. Billy tried not to let that go to his head – not right now, not while he was fucking *pissed*. He'd think about how easily Steve let Billy lead him later when he didn't want to punch his stupid face.

They made it to the Beamer without anyone stopping them and Billy threw Steve against it, finally letting go of the grip on his neck. "Get in the car."

Steve looked at him, remorseful and apologetic, but shoulders still tensed, ready for a fight. "Billy -"

"No." Billy growled. "You said that it wouldn't change anything. You promised me that. So, get in the fucking car."

"It hasn't!" Steve yelled back. "Nothing has changed!"

Billy felt his hands clench, which made him wince as pain twinged in his broken arm, shoulder throbbing a little. "Fuck off, Harrington. Of course it's changed! Look at what the fuck just happened!" He pressed in close to Steve, eyes narrowed, a snarl on his lips. "Don't you ever fucking forget who I am and what I'm capable of."

Steve held his hands up in a sort of surrender, "Look, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to, Billy. I just... reacted."

Billy stepped back, turning away from Steve, a cruelty in his tone that hadn't been there in almost a year. "I don't need you to *protect*

me, Harrington.” He spat out, like even the thought of it was a joke.

He was being mean. He was being more than an asshole. He was just so fucking *angry*, and he was taking it out on Steve. Part of him didn’t want to talk to Steve like this anymore, part of him wanted to bare his fucking neck and kiss Steve in forgiveness. That, of course, just made Billy even angrier.

“Billy, come on.” Steve pushed off of the car but didn’t step closer to Billy. “I didn’t mean to do that, I swear. I heard what you said in your room, I’m not trying to change anything.” He sighed, running a hand over his face, his hair, voice dropping lower. “I know you don’t need me to defend you or... protect you. Trust me, I’m all too aware of what you can do.”

Billy watched as Steve absently touched the thin little scar that peeked out of his hairline and refused to feel guilt. Not right now.

“You just...” Steve continued, sighing. “You were in *pain*.” He said simply, like that explained everything. “I just heard that and reacted. I’m sorry.”

And Billy wanted to stay mad at Steve, because Billy knew this wouldn’t be the only time this sort of thing happened. Would never be the only time when dealing with Alphas. But he couldn’t. Because he understood and... trusted Steve’s word.

And most people went through this shit in middle school, where everyone was already a hormonal nightmare. Billy didn’t envy Steve having to go through it at nineteen.

So Billy glared at him, shoulders tight and head sort of pounding. *Everything just feels wrong*, Steve had said. He wasn't used to the new instincts and smells flooding his system, not yet. Billy let out a deep breath.

"Get in the car."

Steve's shoulders deflated, like strings being cut on a marionette. His big Bambi eyes looked about ready to cry, his pouty mouth trembling a little, in sadness, in anger. "Billy –" He tried again.

"Come on, Harrington." Billy moved toward him finally. "Get in the car. I can't drive."

Steve seemed to sag at that, nodding as he moved out of the way for Billy to get in the passenger's seat.

The car smelled more like him than it ever had. Steve's scent had been potent before, but now that he was presented, it was like the scent just oozed out of him and permeated the air and upholstery. It made Billy a little lightheaded. Made him have to blink a couple of times to clear his head.

Steve slid into the car and just sat for a moment, fiddling with his keys. He wasn't looking at Billy, just gnawing on his lower lip and staring at the keyring in his hands.

“I really am sorry for embarrassing you like that.” Steve said softly. “I literally just promised you that nothing would change and the first moment we’re together again, I fuck it up.”

Billy sighed, rubbing his good hand across his face. His shoulder aches from Tommy’s hand, his head hurts from clenching his jaw, but neither of those things are Steve’s fault. And Billy gets it. He does. He just can’t let Steve get away with it, can’t let it happen again. Or else people will *talk*, and he can’t have that.

“I know you didn’t mean it, Steve. And... I can’t imagine how fucking weird and hard this must be for you – going through this shit now. But,” He turned his body so he was facing Steve, made sure Steve was really looking at him before he continued. “I can’t have you going all *Alpha* on me in public like that, pretty boy. Just can’t happen.”

Steve nodded, understanding, properly chastised. He looked away from Billy’s intense gaze, back down to the keys in his hand. “Got it.” He nodded. “No Alpha shit in public.”

Billy flushed at the alternate meaning behind those words. He could see the slight upturn of Steve’s lips that said he was joking, but that didn’t stop his heart from thumping in overtime, and it certainly didn’t stop his dick from perking up in interest at Steve being his Alpha in *private*.

So Billy just pushed Steve’s shoulder a little too hard to be considered playful. “Fuck off.”

Steve let out a real smile and finally moved to put the key in the

ignition.

Dangerous.

Steve drives them away from the party, away from the woods, and Billy sees something begin to settle in Steve's shoulders. The memory of the first time Billy was in this car with Steve flashes through his mind, Steve's eyes – darting and scared – staring at the tree line, watching, waiting.

Billy gets it now. Understand intimately why Steve had looked so fucking strung out, why he gets so cagey and weird. Especially at night, especially in the woods. Yeah, Billy gets it now.

He pulls out a can of beer from his hoodie pouch and cracks it open, taking a sip. He hands it over to Steve without looking at him.

Steve takes the can and sips a long pull before handing it back. And, Billy knew that Steve had been a partier – you can't be *king* without reigning over your subjects and in a place like this, that meant keg-stands – but it still throws him just how fucking *effortless* Steve made it all seem. Like it was second nature, like it was slipping into another skin.

Billy knew all about that. Knew all about the masks you wear to feel alive, to feel *anything*. It just didn't coincide with the Steve that Billy had first met or the Steve that Billy had come to know.

Because Billy didn't know *King Steve*, had never met him and probably never would. Because Steve just wasn't that guy anymore. The little slips back into that persona were real interesting to witness, though.

Billy takes another sip.

It's late, dark, and Billy has no idea where Steve is driving them. He's been in Indiana for almost a year and Billy still doesn't really know where shit is. He knows how to get where he's gotta go, but beyond that is a guess, especially now that he's not driving himself.

But it's late, and dark, and Steve is driving him. The car is just warm enough to beg off the chill of summer nighttime and the quiet between them is lulling Billy into being comfortable – more comfortable than he's been since Steve left his house a couple days ago.

He's also buzzed enough to settle that aching desperateness inside his chest, buzzed enough to loosen his lips a little. Buzzed enough that when Steve starts talking, Billy wants to talk back.

“You okay though? Really?”

Steve's voice is a soft rumble, quiet and gentle. His voice isn't deep like Billy's, it's rhythmic and lulling. It's the sort of voice meant to sooth a baby, pleasant and charming. It made him feel *safe*, Billy realized. Made him want to listen to whispered hushes and words around laughs and the lilt of a command.

Billy blinked the thought away and took another sip of beer.

“Fine, pretty boy.”

Steve was quiet for a moment, eyes on the road, hand held out for the can. The streets were dead at this time of night, literally no one out except for errant teenagers slinking home from parties. And monsters, Billy corrected. There were probably monsters out, too.

“You seem upset.” Steve said around a sip. “Angry.”

“I’m always angry.” Billy sniped as he took the beer back from Steve.

“No, you’re not.” Steve said gently, looking at Billy briefly from the corner of his eye. “Not anymore.”

Billy sighed, toying with the aluminum in his hands, staring out at the dark nothingness that was Hawkins backroads at night. “No,” He started. “I am. I’m just not angry at you.”

Steve did turn to look at him then, eyes moving between Billy and the road. “What’re you angry about?” He asked gently.

And, for whatever reason, Billy didn’t balk at Steve’s gentleness like he would have before, like he would with other people even now.

And maybe it was Steve's soft voice or the quietness of the car and the night surrounding them, or even the fact that he'd been drinking that made him want to answer. But he knew that it was none of those things – or a combination of all of those things. It was just Steve that made him feel this way, that made him feel *safe* in a way that he'd never felt before.

And wasn't that just fucking terrifying.

Billy took another long pull from the can. "I'm angry about Heather." He started, figuring that was the easiest of his trauma to tackle.

Steve nodded, understanding. He watched as Steve's hands gripped and ungripped the steering wheel as he hesitated to speak. "Were you two..."

"No." Billy shook his head, eyes watching the dark countryside roll by them. "She was just my friend."

Steve's hands released their grip from the wheel, Billy tried really hard not to read into the gesture. "I..." Steve sighed. "I don't even really know what to say. I am sorry, though." He caught Billy's eyes briefly before looking back at the road. "I always liked Heather; we were friendly growing up. It sucks that she's gone."

Billy nodded, looking down at the beer in his hands. Knuckles scarred from fights and working on his car, hands wide and thick and so unlike the dainty thing his biology painted him to be. "It could have been any of us, you know?" He said quietly, staring at his hands. "That thing could've chosen any of us."

Steve lets out a deep sigh. It's sad, and resigned, and full of some sort of heavy weight that Billy can sort of recognize. "Yeah." He said. "I know."

"No wonder you've been so fucked up." Billy muttered around another sip of beer.

Steve huffed through his nose, a parody of a laugh because the sound was anything but funny. He had that sort of detached, dead look in his eyes that had made Billy go over and talk to him in January. He didn't like that fucking look at all.

"Fucked up before all this monster shit." Steve shrugged, like it was whatever, like that was a normal thing to say. "This just... made it *more*."

Oh, and *that* – that Billy understood crystal clear.

"Yeah." Billy passed him back the beer, not looking at him.

Steve was quiet as he finished off the can, tossing it into the backseat. Billy pulled out another from his pouch and cracked it open.

"You said I don't know you."

Billy handed him the new beer. “No, I said that there’s a lot you don’t know about me.” Billy made sure to catch his eye. “There’s a difference.”

“Yeah, hotshot, there is.” There was a playful lilt to Steve’s tone, a slight smile, and that was genuine, Billy could tell. But there was still a tension in the air between them, a seriousness that had yet to fade.

“You probably know more about me than anyone else.” Billy found himself saying. And with the exception of Max, it was true.

He could feel Steve’s eyes on him, moving between Billy and the dark, empty stretch of road in front of them.

“Tell me anyway.” Steve said quietly. Soft enough that Billy turned to look at him. “Tell me what I don’t know.”

Billy looked away from Steve, stared down at the beer in his hands and the darkness of Hawkins, and thought about Steve’s words and the way he had said them. Like he *meant* it. Like he wanted to know Billy almost as desperately as he wanted to know Steve. No one, not ever, had been what Steve was becoming to him.

Because Billy didn’t have friends, not really. Not since his mom left, not since *Omega* and Neil’s complicated stares. Because Billy was not an easy person to like, let alone love. Billy was not the person you went out of your way to understand or know.

But here Steve was – asking, *trying*.

“Why did you give up your crown.” Billy found himself asking instead, the moment feeling a little too big for him to handle.

And Steve sighed, moving a hand from the wheel to run through his hair, elbow against the door, leaning on his fist when he was done. “Because I was tired.” He answers honestly.

“Of what?”

“Everything.” Steve says simply. “Of being an asshole, of trying to feel something other than disappointment.” He swallows thickly and doesn’t look at Billy. It’s hard for him, Billy realizes, to talk about this. Billy wonders if he ever has. “I told you my parents aren’t really around a lot, that isn’t a new development.”

"Figured." Billy says, because he had. Because it had been obvious the first time he strolled into Harrington's house.

Steve nodded, a little sad, a little resigned, and Billy wanted to reach over and place a hand on his neck. He didn't, obviously, but he wanted to. "I was popular and I threw parties and god laid and was a dick because... I didn't *feel* anything, and I wanted to – feel something." He blew out a breath and shook his head. "And then I started dating Nancy, and Jonathan kicked my ass, and I got all tangled up with the monster shit... and then I realized – whatever I thought was bad about my life was nothing compared to this shit, to what someone like El has gone through."

“Don’t do that.” Billy said, brows furrowed. “Don’t compare, don’t minimize.”

It’s something the school shrink used to say to him. He never really understood it until now, until someone he cared about tried to say what they went through didn’t matter. Because back then, Billy had been so wrapped up in his own bullshit that he thought no one else’s even could have ever compared to his. Age and time and *feelings* have shown him that’s not true.

He doesn’t want Steve to feel like he can’t be upset about his own family shit just because Billy’s family shit was a lot more physical. He didn’t ever want Steve to feel like he had to hide from him.

Steve blinked at Billy’s words, something in his shoulders loosening. “Okay. I won’t.” He nodded, then shrugged. “I guess I just realized that I didn’t want to be numb anymore. That the shit I thought was important, the shit I thought would make my parents notice or care, wasn’t worth it.” He shrugged. “I worry about monsters now. And shady government officials and kids that have literally not one ounce of self-preservation.”

They both snorted a little at that because their kids really were the rush headfirst into danger types. Billy took another sip of beer and handed the can over to Steve. “I miss the ocean.” Billy says and he’s not exactly sure why.

But Steve looks at him like the admission was something precious, like the ocean was code for something bigger. Hell – maybe it was. Billy was past being able to keep his mouth shut, not with how loose-

limbed he felt surrounded by Steve's scent, with the darkness enclosing around them making everything feel intimate and quiet.

"Did you live near the ocean?" Steve asks. "I've never seen it."

"Yeah, we did." Billy nods. "Not like, *right* on the beach or anything, but close enough to walk." He takes the beer back from Steve. "I used to go every day."

Steve takes a deep breath and looks at Billy from the corner of his eye. "Why'd you guys leave? You never said."

Billy swallowed past the lies that were building up in his throat, past the memories that threatened to close him up tight. "A lot of things just sort of happened all at once." Billy says eventually. "But the main reason was because my dad asked for a transfer and his job sent him here."

Steve was quiet for a moment, his fingers tapping on the steering wheel in a way that couldn't be casual. "You know that you don't ever have to tell me shit if you don't want to." He slows the car to a gentle stop in the middle of whatever back road they're currently on and turns to really face Billy. "I want to know you. I want to be your best friend too. But if you're uncomfortable or just don't want to, you don't ever have to tell me anything. I'd never force you. I just... I just wanted you to know that."

And Billy looks at Steve and feels himself get angry. Because how fucking dare Steve Harrington make Billy fall in love with him anymore than he already has?

“What makes you think you’re not my best friend?” Billy asks instead of leaning over and kissing him like he wants to.

And Steve smiles. Slow and sweet, tucked right into the corners of his lips.

“You know,” He says around that soft little smile. “For someone that always has something to say, you don’t really talk all that much.”

Billy took a deep breath and leaned back into the passenger’s seat, looking up unseeing at the roof above them. “Yeah, I know.”

“I guess all I was really trying to say is that I’d listen. If you wanted to talk, or whatever.”

“Yeah, well, same goes for you, pretty boy.” Billy says as he leans his head against his shoulder to look at Steve. “No more keeping that shit all bottled up. If something’s bothering you, you come tell me, got it? I don’t want to find you on the floor with Wheeler like that again.”

Steve ducked his head a little in embarrassment and Billy reached over to shove his shoulder so he would look back up at him. He didn’t want Steve to feel humiliated, didn’t want Steve to feel like he had to hide. Not from him.

“Two-way street, s’all I’m saying.”

“Yeah, okay.” Steve nodded. “I get you.”

“Good.” Billy muttered, knocking back the rest of the beer and tossing the can in the back like Steve had done to the one before. “Now take me home, I’m ready to pass out.”

Steve looked like he wanted to say something, and Billy waited, eyes trained patiently on Steve. But whatever the thought was never came. Steve pressed his lips together and nodded, making some turn that would bring them out of the backwoods.

Billy desperately wanted to know what had been on the tip of Steve’s tongue. What had his pretty boy been about to say? He didn’t get the chance to ask though, because suddenly they were easing down Cherry Lane, idling outside of Billy’s house. Had they really been this close all along – or was Hawkins just that small? Maybe it was more of how drunk Billy was, how pretty Steve looked in the dim twilight distracting him.

Steve pulled his gaze away from the house, from the Camaro in the driveway, to Billy. Looking at him all quiet and soft, like Billy was something worth seeing. It tore him up inside a little to have Steve look at him like that, but he didn’t pull his gaze away from Steve.

“How come you’re not driving the Camaro?” Steve asked gently, like even mentioning the car would send Billy into a fit.

Billy sighed, tuning to look out the passenger window to where his

car sat lonely and unused in the driveway. “Need a new ignition cable. Haven’t really been able to go get one. Plus, it’s a bitch trying to drive with a cast.” Billy shrugged.

“I can take you to get one, if you want.” Steve offered.

And that was a normal friend thing to do, but Billy’s fucking goblin brain couldn’t help but read into it. Because his brain *wanted* to read into it.

“Yeah, alright.” He pushed open the door and began the process of hauling himself out. “Thanks for the ride, pretty boy.”

“Hey,” Steve leaned over and stopped him with a hand on his arm. “I really am sorry for earlier.”

Billy sighed and leaned against the hood of the car, stooping a little so he could see Steve. “I already accepted your apology, Harrington. Don’t make me take it back.”

Steve nodded, then again, a little absently. “You going to Vicki’s party tomorrow?”

Billy shrugged his good shoulder, “Maybe. Haven’t decided yet.”

Steve rolled his eyes a little playfully. “Actually want to go together this time? Or are you planning on being an asshole?”

Billy curbed a smile and narrowed his gaze at Steve. What a little fucking punk Harrington could be. “Call me tomorrow and find out.”

Too flirty! his brain screamed. But then Steve smiled and huffed out a little laugh as she shook his head. “Alright, hotshot, I’ll call you tomorrow.”

Billy turned and made his way up to the house and around to where he left his window open. Steve watched him until Billy turned and sent him the finger, only then did he drive away.

He hauled himself through his window and quietly into his room – a lot harder to do with his shoulder still sore and throbbing, he realized. But the house was quiet, and his bedroom door was still shut. So Billy tossed off his clothes and fell into a buzzing heap on the unmade bed.

Fucking Harrington, Billy sighed. What the fuck was he going to do.

Notes for the Chapter:

Steve and Billy drive while drinking (because they're clinically dumb and it's the 80s) ignore them and don't do that please. and thank you all for your wonderful words! I am obsessed with you!!

11. Chapter 11

Billy had woken up to his phone ringing.

An obnoxious shrill noise, of course, right by his head. He swiped his hand over the receiver and put it to his ear, eyes still closed, face still smashed into the pillow beneath him.

“What.”

“Good morning, sunshine.”

Billy could practically hear the smirk in Steve’s groggy voice. He ignored the way his heart jumped in his chest at the endearment.

“Fuck off.” His head sort of pounded a little, but his shoulders relaxed at the sound of Steve’s voice in his ear. Steve huffed a laugh and Billy rolled over onto his back. “What fucking time is it?”

“Twelve-thirty.” Billy groaned and Steve laughed again. It was late, Neil would be annoyed if he was still home. “I’m coming to get you.”

“Why?” Billy asked, pushing fingers into his eyes, hoping to stave off the throbbing. “Party’s not until later.”

“Because you need an ignition cable and I’m hungry.”

Billy felt something swell within him. Steve was just being a good friend, Billy knew that, but he couldn't stop the curl of warmth that flooded his belly at the words anyway.

"Give me thirty minutes."

"You get twenty."

Billy snorted, "Fuck off." He hung up listening to the sound of Steve's laugh.

He languished in bed for a few more minutes, breathing deep to still the stupid rabbiting of his heart and to stall the headache creeping in from not drinking water before passing out last night. He blinked his eyes open after a while and stared at his ceiling, listening to the quiet of the house. That, of course, didn't mean that Neil wasn't home, it just meant that it was quiet, for now.

Billy hauled himself up and out of bed, gathering clean clothes and the stupid garbage bag he needed to tie around his arm to keep his cast from getting wet. He eased open his bedroom door and listened. The tv was playing softly in the living room and Max's door was shut.

Neil was home.

He sighed and quietly made his way into the bathroom, shutting and

locking the door behind him. He ran the sink and filled up the glass that sat on the counter, knocking back a few cups until his mouth didn't feel so fucking dry.

Then he reached over and started up the shower, moving to wrap up his stupid cast in a way that had become sort of practiced since the hospital but was still annoying as fuck. Billy caught his reflection in the mirror and sighed, leaning forward to get a better look.

He looked like shit.

Tired eyed and a little paler than he had been a couple weeks ago, hair a fluffy mess, bruises still lining his shoulder. No wonder Steve had thought something was wrong with him last night. He looked like shit.

Billy pushed away from the mirror and finished undressing, hopping into the warm water and closing his eyes. Billy had always loved the water – any water. Showers, baths, pools, the ocean. Water was soothing to Billy, made him feel cleansed in an abstract way.

Right now, it helped to make him feel more awake, more human. The warm spray washed away the scent of sweat and beer and whatever else clung to his skin. It helped ease his hangover and gentled his headache. Billy would've loved to spend forever under the warm water, but he didn't want to piss off his dad more than Billy was certain he already was, so he kept it short.

He towel-dried his hair so it laid in damp waves over the back of his t-shirt, hopped into his jeans best he could. He left the bathroom,

throwing his dirty clothes into the hamper in his bedroom, before making his way into the kitchen. Steve had said twenty minutes, so Billy wanted to get this over with before Steve got here.

He pulled a cup down from the cabinet and poured some orange juice, knowing that when he closed the fridge, Neil would appear.

“You were out late last night.”

Billy turned from the fridge to see his dad standing by the table, arms crossed. He didn’t necessarily look angry, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t. Neil had a habit of keeping himself coiled until he was ready to attack – like a snake, Billy thought not for the first time.

He nodded, sipping his juice and leaning back against the counter. His body posture was open and tired, not aggressive or combative. He wanted to leave when Steve got here, couldn’t do that if he was in a fight.

“Yeah.” He shrugged.

Neil just stared at him, eyes narrowed, accessing. Billy drank his juice and tried to keep himself from tensing up, from snapping like he wanted, like he would have before. Right now wasn’t the time to growl back and try to assert his dominance, not when Steve was on his way here.

“Just because you can’t work doesn’t mean I’m going to let you laze

around here all summer.”

There was an edge to his voice, a glint to his narrowed eyes that Billy recognized as provocation. And while he could feel the urge to posture and snarl building up within his chest, he didn't. Because his dad wanted to see if he'd get angry, so then he'd be allowed to push him back into line. It was something Neil had always done, it had just taken a long time for Billy to realize it.

“I'm actually going to get a new ignition cable now.” Billy said as he sipped his juice. “Figured I'd work on the Camaro a bit.”

Neil held his gaze for a moment before pointing a finger at him. “Find another job.”

And Billy wanted to scream.

Wanted to yell *I just got out of the hospital; I just witnessed my friend die; Monsters are real and I fought one; I'm so tired*. But he didn't. Because... it didn't matter. None of it mattered – not to Neil.

So instead, he nodded. Clenched his jaw around the words that were so desperate to come out and made sure to keep his dad's gaze.

Because Neil didn't want him to be an Omega. Neil wanted him to be an Alpha, and Alphas didn't back down. But he also wanted Billy's submission. Wanted Billy to follow his command and didn't want him to put up a fight about it. It was a balancing act that Billy had been

trying to manage since he had presented, one he rarely succeeded at.

But this? This he could do.

“Okay.” He said easily, eyes on Neil’s, posture still open.

Neil pinned him there with his gaze for another moment before turning back to the living room, leaving Billy alone.

He sagged once his dad left the room, turning to wash out the glass and place it on the drying rack. He clenched his jaw and let out a few deep breaths through his nose before going back to his room and finished getting ready.

He had his curtain open so he’d be able to see when Steve pulled up. He sprayed his hair a little, just enough that he didn’t look so homeless and downtrodden, then slipped on his boots. He was shoving his wallet and cigarettes into his pockets when the Beamer slid down his street and parked in front of the house.

Billy slipped out of his room and down the hall when he heard Max’s door fly open. She appeared beside him quickly, eyes big and pleading. “Can I come with you?”

Billy looked from her to where his dad was sitting on the couch, eyeing him, newspaper open on his lap.

“You still grounded?” He asked Max but they both knew it was actually aimed at Neil.

Max looked between him and Neil, chewing on the inside of her cheek. She turned fully to Neil then, “Can I please go out with Billy?”

Neil took Max in, then Billy, who was waiting by the door. He tried to appear casual and loose, like he didn’t care one way or another. If he was too interested, Neil would say no automatically. If he was too uninterested, Neil wouldn’t let either of them go out.

Billy should join the damn circus with all of this fucking tightrope walking.

“Are you still grounded, Maxine?” Neil asked calmly from his position on the couch.

Billy could hear Max inhale, could see the tension in her shoulders as she glared back at Neil. “Yes.”

Neil shrugged casually, like this whole conversation was light and breezy, turning back to the tv. “Then you have your answer.”

Max bit at her cheek to keep from yelling back, her hands fisting at her sides. Steve was outside, and Billy needed to go before Steve came to the door, but he found himself opening his mouth instead.

“We’re just going to the shop and grabbing a bite.” Billy said toward his father with a shrug. “I don’t give a shit if she comes.”

He tried to keep his tone easy, like he didn’t actually give a shit one away or another. He also hoped that Neil would view this as some sort of sibling bonding thing, would see that Billy was *trying* and allowed it.

Neil glanced over at the two of them, folded newspaper in one hand, news playing softly on the tv in front of him. He eyed Billy silently, gaze then sliding over to Max. He pinned her there for a moment, calculating look in his blue eyes. Eventually, Neil looked back down at the paper in his hand, dismissing them.

“The store and lunch.” Neil conceded. “Then she has to help you work on the car.”

Billy nodded, even though his dad wasn’t looking at them anymore and shuffled Max out of the living room and the out of the house before Neil could change his mind. Steve was in his car and smoking a cigarette that he put out at the sight of them, smiling brightly as they walked across the lawn.

“Hey!” He called out of the open window. “I thought you were grounded, Mad Max?”

Billy slid into the passengers seat, flushing slightly at the thought of being in this same spot just last night and all the things that were said between them in the dark. Max flung herself into the backseat with a huff, sitting in the middle so she could lean in between them,

and disrupting Billy's train of thought.

"I am." She groaned. "But I got time off for good behavior."

Billy snorted and shook his head at her dramatics, Steve just smiled at her. "Food first?" He asked, looking between Billy and Max. "I'm starving."

"Yes!" Max crowed. "I'm so sick of bologna sandwiches."

Steve let out one of those big laughs he did around the kids, smiling wide as she shook his head and drove away from Cherry Lane.

The diner was dead as they ate their burgers and fries.

Max had immediately claimed one side of the booth, sliding in and stretching out dramatically as she slumped against the formica table, groaning how she hadn't seen any of her friends or been out in the daylight in days. Steve had just snorted and slid into the other side of the booth, listening to Max whine and throwing out remarks casually as he looked over the plastic menu.

Billy had slid in beside Steve, ignoring the way his scent wrapped around them in their little booth, ignoring the way it made him want to curl up into Steve and close his eyes. His head only ached a little

and whatever nausea he felt was because he hadn't eaten anything since dinner last night, but he was still so tired and Steve felt so warm.

He had shaken that part of himself away and tried not to lean into Steve's side too much, not enough that it would tempt him or give him away. But he wasn't strong enough to keep himself away from Steve entirely, which he was choosing to just absolutely not think about.

They ordered food and Max obnoxiously sipped her milkshake as her and Steve went on and on about some stupid thing Mike had done at the last D&D night. Billy noted that they didn't talk about Starcourt, didn't even bring up anything close to surrounding that topic. Just rolled their eyes and talked about the boys and Robin other easy shit. It was... nice, he realized. Nice to listen to them shoot the shit and pretend that, for right now, everything was normal, that everything was fine.

It was easy to sink into the vinyl seating, good shoulder pressing into Steve's as they picked their way through their food in a near-empty diner. Max had shoved her pickles in Billy's direction and in turn he had slid the little cup of coleslaw her way, and that was normal. But then Steve began pushing fries onto Billy's plate, even while he was still eating his burger.

Billy had side-eyed him, but said nothing. He wasn't sure if Steve had told the kids yet about his new Alpha status – Billy thought not only because Max hadn't charged into his room yet and demanded to know everything he did – so he didn't want to blow Steve's cover. But Billy knew what Steve was doing, however unconscious it may be.

Steve was *providing* for him, just like that time in school when he'd trekked all across campus to give Steve a box of fries. Just like all the times that Billy had been without lunch and Steve had let him eat off his plate.

And – fuck. Things were really making a lot of sense now, weren't they?

Billy fought off a flush at the mere fucking *thought* of it, but that's what Steve's subconscious had been doing for months. Steve had those Alpha instincts even back then, even before he knew that Billy was an Omega, even before he had presented. He also tried to push away the annoyance he felt that Steve's stupid Alpha urges were set on treating him like some fragile little *girl*. Because Billy wasn't a girl. He had beaten Steve in a fight, he was more than capable. He may be an Omega, but Billy was anything but fragile.

Instead of getting worked up by it, Billy just ate the stupid fries and let himself lean against Steve's shoulder. Steve's body was warm from the summer heat, warmer than Billy had ever remembered and it made him feel sleepy. He felt content sitting here in this diner pressed up against Steve, eating his offered food, and listening to him and Max bullshit. It was nice. Comforting, even.

Then Max sucked down the last of her milkshake and their plates were cleared and the waitress was eyeing both Steve and Billy like she was thinking about mounting both of them right there, so it was time to leave. Billy had elbowed Steve, waiting to get his attention before tilting his head slightly toward the waitress leaning against the counter, looking at them with a dreamy sigh. Billy tried to keep the smirk off his lips and the chuckle in his chest, but he could feel the smile curling up his lips at the sight of the chick's desperation.

Steve's brows furrowed a little at Billy's smirky face, eyes moving from him to the waitress. Steve sort of pouted a little when he saw her looking, pulling his gaze away quickly and moving to grab his wallet. The move put him more firmly into Billy's space and gave him a nice deep whiff of Steve's scent. It smelled warmer, spicier and Billy wanted to drink it in. He wanted to bottle up Steve's scent like cologne and splash it on every day. That thought, of course, made him think about where he actually *put* his cologne and caused a bright flush to settle over his ears and cheeks at the thought of rubbing Steve's scent over his dick.

Not something appropriate to think about at all in front of his kid sister and the three other people in the diner. Not appropriate at all.

So Billy pushed himself out of the booth as Steve dropped some money on top of the bill *Shannon* had put down on the table, her phone number very obviously written on the back. And suddenly, her dreamy eyes and wandering eyes weren't funny anymore.

"Bye, Billy." Shannon smiled all flirty from where she leaned against the counter. "Bye, *Steve*."

Steve looked over at the waitress, the very purposeful bedroom eyes she directed at Steve were enough to make Billy bristle. But Steve just sort of half-smiled politely and raised a hand in goodbye. "Thanks, Shannon."

"Anytime, Harrington." She smirked back.

“Let’s go, pretty boy.” Billy pushed forward with Max, trying to keep his stupid middle school jealousy at bay. “Daylight’s a burning.”

And Steve trailed behind him like a command, appearing at Billy’s side like he’d never left. It settled something in him to have Steve follow him the way he did, but that hot current of bitterness still wound through him at the girl’s very obvious attraction.

But then Max was pulling his attention away from the pretty waitress and the way she had said Steve’s name, instead making him tell Steve the story about the first time he tried to teach Max how to skate and the wild wipeout that caused the whole park to laugh. That had been a good day, and it was a nice memory between them – one of the few, if Billy was being honest with himself. He had been cruel to Max in the time that they had known each other, and she had deserved some of that cruelty, but not all of it. Things were starting to be different now, and Billy was glad for it.

“You can skate?” Steve asked with curious eyes.

“Yeah?”

“He can surf too.” Max piped up between them.

Steve smiled, “Now that I figured.” He eyed Billy in the seat next to him, gaze moving from him to the road and back again, just like last night. “I just never pictured you on a skateboard, Hargrove.”

“Sorry to shatter your image of me, pretty boy.” Billy said around lighting a cigarette.

“He was pretty good at it.” Max continued, smiling sharply up at Steve from where she was leaning on the console between them. “But I’m better.”

Billy snorted, blowing out the smoke in his lungs. “Yeah, you are, shitbird.”

“Maybe you could teach me sometime.” Steve asked softly, eyeing Billy from the corner of his eyes.

Billy and Max shared a look, smiles curling up their cheeks before laughing. Steve looked between them, confusion lining his features at their obvious mirth over his statement.

“Yeah, okay, Bambi.”

Max cackled, falling back into her seat at Billy’s comment. Steve pouted, looking between them and the road, and Billy wanted so badly to just lean over and press a kiss to those lips, to sooth him and shush him. He took another drag of his cigarette to curb that urge.

“What?” Steve asked, pouty expression still on full display.

Billy smiled at him, face softening to ease Steve’s worries. “You’d

definitely break something if you ever got on a skateboard, Steve. You're all limbs." Steve looked like he was about to protest, and Billy cut him off before he could. "Which is not a bad thing. Except for skating."

Steve rolled his eyes but settled back into his seat once he realized that Billy and Max were just taking the piss and weren't actually making fun of him. It was a complex, Billy was realizing. Steve did not like people to think he was stupid. Billy was confident this had something to do with his dad and college, and it was something Billy wanted to keep an eye on.

They made it to the auto shop and Billy instructed both Steve and Max to stay in the car. Last thing he needed was the guy taking one look at Steve's pretty face and expensive jeans and charging Billy double because he thought they were suckers. Steve might be fucking clueless, but Billy certainly wasn't.

The whole thing was fairly painless as he requested the cable, which the guy happened to have in stock. They talked about the Camaro and other cars, Billy eager to prove himself while the guy found the cable and rung him up. It cost a fucking arm, which he'd been prepared for and dipped into his pool money, but it'd be worth it to drive himself around again. He stopped before leaving, turning back to the desk and asking the guy if he was hiring. The guy had taken one look at his cast and raised a brow, told him to come back when he wasn't a fucking hazard and he'd see what Billy could do.

It was a start, and more than he had expected to be honest, but it was still disappointing that he couldn't immediately go back to Neil with a job lined up. Maybe once the Camaro was fixed, he could see if the pizza joint was hiring. Billy could deliver pizzas with a broken arm, plus he was sure the moms of Hawkins would tip well if he flirted a

bit.

The drive back to Cherry Lane wasn't long enough. Because Billy wasn't ready for Steve to leave, even if he'd be seeing him later tonight. He also wasn't particularly in the mood to be around Neil, not after laughing and smiling and feeling fucking comfortable with Steve and Max. But when they pulled up, Neil's truck was gone, which meant he had probably gone to take Susan to lunch on her break. It meant they had some time and a weight felt like it had been lifted off his shoulders.

"Wanna learn how to change an ignition cable?" Billy asked casually and felt himself warm up at Steve's answering smile.

Max had to be out here with them in case Neil showed back up, but she was mostly uninterested once Billy lifted the hood of his car. Not because she wasn't interested in cars, but mostly because Billy had already taught Max a thing or two and she, in all of her youthful superiority, felt like this lesson couldn't possibly be aimed at her when Steve didn't even know how to change his oil.

"Are you fucking kidding me, Steve?" Billy at growled when Max had revealed that particular piece of information, sitting on the ground a few feet away reading a comic. "You don't even know how to change your damn oil?"

Steve blushed and Billy wanted to lick the heat off his skin. "Uh, no?"

Billy shook his head, moving back toward his engine. "I'll teach you."

Steve blinked, like he had expected Billy to yell at him or call him an idiot. And maybe earlier in the year he might have. But now... Billy didn't want to yell at Steve now. Billy wanted to fucking teach Steve instead of knock him down.

So Steve watched with interest as Billy explained to him everything he was doing as he changed the cable, pointing out other parts of the engine and all the typical maintenance one was supposed to take care of when they owned a car.

"We usually just take it to the shop for all this shit." Steve said sheepishly, hand swiping through his hair in the way Billy had recognized to mean he was nervous or embarrassed.

"Most people do." Billy shrugged. "But if you're fucking stranded or some shit, you should know why your car's fucked and how you might be able to fix it. Plus, if you actually know the problem, the guys at the shop can't upcharge you."

Max had wandered back inside once Billy had dropped the hood of the car back into place. He sat against the front end, leaning casually as he lit another cigarette and looked at Steve.

Steve moved to lean next to him and once again, they were shoulder to shoulder, thigh to thigh. It reminded Billy of when they had started to become friends and Steve had taken Billy out to the quarry, how they had sat like this and stared out at the water and the view. Now they were staring at the ugly paneling of Billy's garage, but the feeling was the same.

Billy felt looser with Steve pressed against him as he was, with Steve invading his space and stealing the cigarette right from his lips. Billy watched him take a deep drag, eyes closing, like he was wholly content to just sit beside Billy and share his smoke. It made something burn within him, something desperate and clawing, an ache. He ached for Steve, which was ridiculous and dramatic, but he did.

They finished the cigarette, passing it back and forth until it was all but gone, Billy stubbing it out with the toe of his boot.

“So I’ll pick you up tonight,” Steve said as he pushed off the Camaro, hands shoving into the pockets of his jeans in the way that made Billy’s eyes zero in on his dick. “For the party.”

The Camaro was fixed. There was absolutely no reason for Steve to pick him up now that Billy could drive, cast or no cast. But Billy found himself nodding, pushing himself up off the car as well. “Sure, pretty boy.”

And Steve smiled – a soft, private little thing that twisted up Billy’s insides. Because that wasn’t the big, joyful thing that he’d been throwing at Billy and Max all day. No, this was something quiet, intimate. Something that was just meant for the two of them.

“Good.”

He sauntered away like a boy in a movie after he’d kissed a girl

goodnight and Billy felt his heart thunder in his chest as he watched Steve slid into his car and drive off. He let out a deep breath and pressed his hands against his eyes.

Well, shit.

Billy leaned his good shoulder against the living room wall as he smirked down at the girl in front of him. She was blonde and pretty, small in that dainty sort of way that made him think of cheerleaders on the top of the pyramid and roller-skating on the pier – different from Wheeler's brand of petite and so far away from what Billy found so attractive about Steve.

He didn't know her name. Didn't care to. If he was pressed, he would maybe be able to remember the class they shared last semester, but none of that mattered. No, what mattered was the way she looked up at him through her long lashes and the way she'd walk out of here with him when he was ready.

Because Billy had spent the whole day practically shoulder to shoulder with Steve and he *needs* this. Needs to fuck and get it out of his system. And where better to do that than at a party with someone he doesn't intend on ever seeing again?

So Billy flirts with the little blond Beta and ignores Steve's gaze from across the room. He could *feel* it, Steve's eyes on him, like a physical sensation. His skin pricked and he could feel the tingle that always accompanied goosebumps begin to slide over his skin. But that didn't

matter, because Billy was so fucking keyed up, so fucking *horny*, and had been since the hospital. It was a desperation at this point, beyond a want or need.

Because Billy had fucked his fist quick and dirty as soon as Steve had left his house, scent still heavy in his nose and shoulder still warm from where Steve had pressed. And when Steve had showed up a handful of hours later, looking so fucking pretty and shiny like he was ready for a goddamn date – something in Billy sort of snapped.

Steve looked like he was ready to take someone home tonight and Billy couldn't think about that without being blinded with rage. So, instead, Billy had ditched Steve almost immediately and gotten himself a drink. He had eyed the large group of drunken teens crowded tight in Vicki's living room and found the blond smirking back at him.

She was talking about some cool bookstore she had found in Indianapolis and how she thought *The Glass Menagerie* was better than *A Streetcar Named Desire*. She was both hot and incredibly smart, Billy was finding, and there was a part of him that didn't want to do this to her. Because the more she talked in that easy, cool voice of hers, the more Billy found he wanted to talk back. He'd still fuck her, because she was beautiful and sharp and her opinion on Orson Welles was fascinating, and also because Steve was staring at him from across the room and Billy could feel his gaze like a burn.

The girl – Gemma – stepped away to use the bathroom and Billy took the moment to just lean against the wall and finish off the rest of his beer. He wasn't drinking like he had last night, just enough to wet his whistle and show everyone else he was interested. Because you couldn't hang at a party without a cup in your hand. The last thing he needed tonight was Tommy or one of the other guys calling him

out about not drinking at a party and how fucking weird that was for him.

But Billy wasn't looking to get wasted, not tonight. Not when he was intent on fucking Gemma, not when he needed to keep his head about him and not groan Steve's name as he came. So he placed the empty cup down beside some potted plant and stood from his lean, adjusting his shoulder. He was tenderly prodding the slight ache that had persisted since he removed the sling when Steve suddenly appeared before him and grabbed his elbow, dragging him out of the room.

And Billy could stop him. Could plant his fucking feet and throw off Steve's hand. He could do a lot of things, but he didn't. He let Steve lead him out of the party, down the front steps and down the street a bit. Once Billy realized that Steve was leading him toward where he parked the car, Billy stopped, pulling his arm from Steve's grip.

"Where's the fucking fire, man?"

But Steve didn't say anything, just turned toward Billy, hands on his hips like he was scolding the kids. His pouty mouth was pinched, jaw clenched tight, and Billy could see the way his fingers dug into his hips, like he was keeping them there instead of reaching out.

"Steve?" Billy tried again, a little softer this time. "What's up?"

Steve sighed, moving one of his hands from his hip up to his hair. "Nothing." He shrugged, almost aggressively. "I don't know."

Billy looked at him skeptically, confused by Steve's odd behavior and also a little annoyed that he had let an Alpha just drag him out of the party and away from the girl he had been wooing. But the Alpha had been Steve and he'd much rather woo him than some chick, so Billy was one hundred percent sure that's why he wasn't as pissed as he would be otherwise.

"Okay." Billy said, still looking at Steve suspiciously. "Well, I'm gonna go back inside now."

He turned away from Steve and made it back up the street when he felt Steve grab his elbow again and drag him in between two houses. It was dark, and Billy could hear the loud music and voices of the party a couple houses over from where they were now. He shrugged Steve off of him and took a step back, looking at him incredulously.

"What the fuck is the matter with you?"

And Steve looked angry in the twilight, pouty lips twisted in a frown, divot between his brows. "You're ignoring me."

Billy rolled his eyes, "I am not."

"You are." Steve pressed, stepping toward him. "You've been ignoring me all night."

“Steve,” Billy said intently, catching his gaze. “We’re not fucking attached at the hip, I told you that last night.”

Steve stepped toward him and Billy held his ground, but his back was already against the side of the house, so he wasn’t sure it mattered much. Steve stood right in front of him and sighed, pressing his hands into his eyes. When he took them away, Billy could see how dilated his pupils had become.

“I know that.” Steve sighed. “I just –”

He cut himself off and looked down at the ground between them, shaking his head. Billy reached forward and gently placed a hand on Steve’s shoulder. He had no idea what was going on, but Steve looked a little out of it and Billy could afford to be soft with him while they were alone.

“I don’t feel good.” Steve muttered and Billy stepped a little closer to him, other hand coming up to rest on his other shoulder as well.

Steve sort of collapsed into him like he had that day in Billy’s bedroom. He didn’t cry, or wind his arms around Billy, but his body just sort of sank right into Billy’s embrace. He pressed his forehead against Billy’s good shoulder and Billy moved his arms so that they were holding Steve to him.

He smelled intense – scent sharp and rich and spicy. It made Billy want to drop to his knees, to curl up in Steve’s sheets and rub them all over himself, to burrow deeply in Steve’s neck and wrap around him. He blinked past the urge and just held Steve, let his breathing

return to normal. He could tell that Steve was scenting him, turning his face just slightly toward Billy's neck. Steve didn't push forward, didn't press his face and lips there like he would have before, but he could tell that Steve wanted to.

Steve's hair was soft under his fingertips, longer than it had been the first time Billy had saw him in the school parking lot, but just as silky smooth as he had thought that day. He felt calm with Steve in his arms and knew that his scent was in turn making Steve calm as well. All thoughts of the party and the girl were gone from his mind, instead he focused on not popping his zipper with Steve's hips so close to his and Steve's warm scent ripe in his nose.

Billy felt Steve begin to pull back, not far, just lifted his head from Billy's shoulder so he could look at him. They were almost chest to chest, close like they had been in the hospital before Steve presented, close like they had been in Billy's bedroom when Steve scented him and cried. Close enough that Billy could see the fever flush staining over Steve's pale skin and the way his pupils swallowed the brown of his eyes.

Close enough to not notice right away as Steve leaned in, slowly, so slowly, to press his lips against Billy's.

And Billy's heart felt like it was literally beating out of his chest. Air stuck in his throat, hands fisted tight in Steve's shirt, body coiled tight and perfectly still.

The kiss was light – just a gentle press of lips, so soft Billy was almost convinced it wasn't there at all.

Until Steve pressed in a bit harder, lips moving over Billy's, begging him silently to open up. Billy had never been kissed like this, so soft and sweet and heart stopping. Billy's lips pressed back because his body knew what to do even with his brain offline like it was, and Steve actually sighed into his mouth once Billy began kissing him back.

Billy felt himself open, felt Steve lick gently into his mouth, felt his back lean harder against the house behind them as Steve kept pressing forward. Steve was an excellent fucking kisser, even as gentle and romantic as this kiss was, and Billy felt himself sink into it, hands gripping Steve's back tighter, lips sliding against Steve's, licking deep into his mouth.

And then Steve pulled back, eyes blinking like he was trying to clear away a fog that had come over him. Mouth red and swollen from Billy's lips. That fever flush high and red. Eyes so dilated and hooded that Billy almost thought Steve looked drugged again.

Steve stumbled back from him, staring at Billy like he couldn't believe what he'd just done, chest still panting from the kiss. "Sorry." He muttered, looking from Billy to the empty air around them like he had no idea how he'd gotten here. "I –" He cut himself off with a shake of his head and stumbled away.

Billy watched him go, watched him walk down toward his car, back still pressed to the side of some house, skin heated and lips tingling. He was hard in his jeans, harder than he'd ever fucking been outside of heat and Billy let his eyes close and his head thunk back against the house behind him. Shaky fingers reached up to press against his swollen lips, hot to the touch.

What the actual fuck.

Notes for the Chapter:

so... what was that all about, huh??

12. Chapter 12

Billy went home.

After Steve had kissed him so sweetly in the dark and left him there, he went home. Walked all the way from Vicki's to Cherry Lane and hoped the cool summer air would clear his head.

It didn't.

Because – what the actual fuck?

Steve had *kissed* him.

Billy sat in the Camaro. He couldn't bring himself to go inside, sneak through his window and lay in his bed and think about Steve and the way his mouth had moved so gently and intently over his own. So instead, Billy sat in his car and stared at nothing and just let his thoughts whirl around in his head.

Steve had left.

Walked away from him and driven home.

But he hadn't looked right, the whole thing hadn't been right.

Because Steve had fucking *kissed* him.

Billy started the car before he could think whether it was a good idea or not. Pulling out of his driveway and down the street before he could talk himself out of it.

When he got to the Harrington's, a car was already parked in Steve's driveway. Jonathan's car. Had Steve called him? Was Nancy with them? Why the fuck were they here?

Billy's gut swooped and he felt like something was wrong. A small part of him worried that Steve had called them about *Billy*, but there was a bigger part of him that couldn't stop thinking about Steve's dilated pupils and his shaky hands and the way he had said *I don't feel good*.

So he got out of the car before he could think twice and moved to knock on the door.

Nancy answered.

Wide eyes almost scared as she looked at him from the open doorway. "Billy!" She said in surprise.

She then moved quickly to shut the front door behind her, hands holding the handle tightly as he heard someone bang against the door

from the other side.

“What the fuck?” Billy felt his shoulders tense as he stared at the door behind her.

“You should go.” She said seriously and Billy was very suddenly no longer faced with a wide-eyed Nancy Wheeler. No, this was the Nancy that had thrown him a shotgun while a giant meat monster stomped toward them through the trees. Firm and unwavering. “Now, Billy. You should go now.”

“Tell me what that fuck is going on and I’ll think about it.” Billy barked back, concern and anger written all over his features.

Nancy sighed, looking over her shoulder at the door behind her, then to Billy standing in front of her. Shoulders dropping as she shook her head, hands still holding the knob to the door. “Steve’s in rut.”

And Billy had known that something was wrong – that was the whole reason that he had come over here in the first place. But hearing the words actually fall from Nancy’s mouth was just... a lot. Even if the thought had been tucked away in the back of his mind, he wasn’t at all prepared for her to actually say it.

“He called you?” Billy managed after a moment.

Nancy looked at him curiously, brows furrowed a little as she tried to figure him out. “Yeah, a little while ago. He said that he felt like

something was wrong. I was with Jonathan, so we came right over.”

Billy nodded as he thought over Steve’s behavior at the party and from earlier in the day, how he had felt too warm, how his scent smelled too rich. Billy should have known, should have been able to put it together.

Another bang sounded against the door, Jonathan’s muffled voice shouting, and Nancy held firm, eyeing the wood. A growl came through and Billy felt goosebumps prick at his skin.

“Come on,” He gestured towards the door. “Let’s go inside.”

Nancy turned to look at him like he was crazy, moving to block him even though Billy hadn’t actually stepped forward yet. “No. Billy, you can’t go in there! He’s in *rut*. He could hurt you or it could trigger your heat, and then neither of you would be able to control yourselves.” Nancy shook her head emphatically. “No, I’m not allowing that to happen to either of you.”

“Wheeler,” Billy started, making sure to look Nancy right in the eyes, and pointed toward the door. “He’s coming after me whether I’m out here or in there. So, unless you want all the rich neighbors to watch him to break down the door and chase me down the street, we might as well move this inside.”

“But –”

“Have either of you ever actually dealt with someone in rut before?” Billy asked, cutting her off.

Nancy sighed, “No.”

Billy nodded, “Open the door.”

Nancy looked at him for a moment, deciding. Her shoulders dropped in defeat and she turned to face the door, hands still tight around the knob. She looked back at him from over her shoulder, big eyes full of worry and determination.

“What if he hurts you?” She asked honestly. And the fact that Nancy Wheeler was even worried about him getting hurt at all was a shock to his system. “We don’t know how he’s going to react to you and everyone’s cycles are different.”

“Wheeler –”

“He’ll regret it if he hurts you.” She said softly, looking up at him. “I know he will.”

Billy swallowed around the feelings blooming in his chest at her words. He pushed those down and made himself roll his eyes instead. “Nancy. I laid Steve out before – easily. I can do it again if necessary.” Then, a little softer at the look in her eyes. “I’m more than capable of protecting myself. And him.”

Nancy held his gaze and nodded, “Okay.” She took in a deep breath, then let it out. “Okay.”

As soon as she pushed open the front door, a couple things happened very quickly.

One – Nancy was shoved, none too gently out of the way. Two – Billy was hauled over the threshold by the front of his shirt and slammed into the wall beside the door. Three – Jonathan, exasperated and out of his depth, tried to pull Steve off of him to no avail. And four – Steve crowded in against him, scenting and burrowing into his neck.

Billy looked at Nancy and Jonathan over Steve’s shoulders, watching as they stared at him wide-eyed and unsure of what to do. Steve growled loudly every time Jonathan tried to pry him away from Billy and just pressed even closer. Nancy watched on with worried eyes, talking over the growling, gently admonishing Steve for his behavior. Jonathan had stepped back, his hands out subconsciously, like he was ready to reach over at a moment’s notice.

But Steve wasn’t really doing anything but pinning him to the wall, so Billy gently brought his hands down to rest across Steve’s shoulders and back, t-shirt stretched tight. He rubbed soothingly over his warm skin – not hot, not yet, which was good, that gave them time to figure this out.

“Yeah, you’re alright.” Billy said quietly to Steve, who shuddered a little at the sound of Billy’s voice and the feeling on hands on his body.

Billy tried to push forward off the wall, but Steve growled and pressed him back harder. Jonathan stepped forward, as did Nancy, but Billy held out a hand for them to wait. Steve was barely in rut, he wasn't hot, not yet, he wasn't sweating, his scent hadn't spiked, which meant they had time. They could do this slow.

"Come on, pretty boy. Let's move this party to a comfier locale, yeah?" Billy gripped Steve in a hug and pushed off the wall again, muttering softly to Steve as he did so. And Steve let him, let himself be walked to the living room and sat on the couch, face pressed against Billy's neck the entire time.

It was only then that Billy pulled back, gripping Steve by the back of the neck, other hand tilting his jaw up so that Billy could look into his eyes. They were hazy, but not gone. Ruts and heats weren't usually all consuming, they weren't total blackouts for most people. Sometimes they could be, for some they were bad, but for the majority it wasn't *lose all of your facilities* bad. If Steve was normal, he'd get burning hot, ridiculously horny, and fade in and out of clarity for two to three days. Because it was his first rut, they'd have to keep him hydrated and make sure he ate, but as the ruts went on, Steve's body would eventually learn to regulate a lot of it on his own and he'd be clear headed for longer.

Nancy and Jonathan moved with them into the living room, coming to stand behind the couch where Billy could easily see them. He kept his hands on Steve, absently stroking through his hair with his casted hand and the other still firmly placed on the back of Steve's neck. It would keep him calm, especially right now before he was fully rutting.

Billy looked between them, watching as Nancy nervously crossed her arms and chewed on the inside of her lip and Jonathan held his hands loosely on his hips like a mock-imitation of Steve. They both looked worried, Billy was sure he did too. Because what the fuck where they going to do with Steve?

“What should we do?” Nancy voiced first, looking between the three of them, eyes landing on the way Steve leaned against Billy on the couch. “We can’t just leave him here like this.”

Jonathan nodded, “We can’t, it’s not safe. Should we... should we call his parents?”

Nancy sighed, dropping her arms and sitting on the arm of the armchair beside the couch. “I don’t know where they are. I wouldn’t know how to get a hold of them. Maybe if we can get him in a more lucid moment we could ask, but honestly, he probably wouldn’t even want them here anyway.”

Billy shook his head, thinking. “He shouldn’t even be in rut this early.” He caught Nancy’s eye and nodded toward the stairs. “Go see if he’s been taking his pills.”

Nancy moved as soon as the words left his mouth, running up to Steve’s bedroom with purpose. Jonathan’s brows furrowed as he moved a little closer to the couch to get a better look at Steve. “You don’t think he’s been taking them.”

“I don’t know.” Billy shrugged. “But it’s only been a couple of weeks since he presented. He shouldn’t have another rut until the Fall if he’s

taking them correctly.”

Jonathan ran a slim hand through his fringe as he thought over what Billy said. Nancy reappeared with a pill bottle in her hand, shaking it at them as she rounded the couch. “He’s taking them. I counted.”

“You said he shouldn’t have another rut until the Fall,” Jonathan started, looking between him and Nancy and the pill bottle in her hand. “But couldn’t he be, like, *triggered* into one?”

Both Nancy and Jonathan looked at Billy meaningfully at the words, but Billy ignored it. His ears might be bright red, but he sure as shit wasn’t going there while Steve was sweating against him.

“Not if he’s taking them. *Maybe* a compatible Omega in heat could override the medication enough to break his cycle, but that’s a big maybe.”

Nancy and Jonathan looked at each other again, reading each other’s minds like couples often did. It soured Billy a little, because he couldn’t understand the look that passed between them and he also didn’t like what it may imply. Nancy looked back toward him with her big blue eyes all earnest and placating.

“You’ve been with him a lot the last couple days, haven’t you?”

Billy’s eyes narrowed. “*I’m* not in heat.” He growled.

“Well, this is very much not normal, then.” Jonathan sighed, arms crossing over his chest. “Should we take him to the hospital? Or call Doctor Owens?”

“No.” Billy and Nancy said at the same time.

“We’re not taking him back to that fucking place.” Billy said emphatically and Steve began nuzzling under Billy’s jaw to calm him down. It worked, which was annoying.

“I really don’t think we should be taking him anywhere.” Nancy agreed. “He’s okay for now, but he might fall deeper into rut while we’re out and that could get bad really fast.”

Jonathan opened his mouth but whatever he had been about to say was cut off by a knock to the front door. They all looked at each other with confusion, worry lining their features as another knock came.

Billy moved from the couch, Steve giving a little whine at the movement, reaching out for him to stay. Billy gripped the back of Steve’s neck firmly, tilting his neck so he could look into Steve’s eyes. “Pretty boy, I’m gonna need you to sit tight for a second, okay?”

Steve nodded, eyes a little cloudy but not enough to concern Billy quite yet. No, right now Steve was just cuddly and foggy, they had some time before the fever spiked and made him desperate to knot. Billy pushed the thought of *Steve* and *knotting* from his mind as

he moved away from the couch and toward the door, Nancy and Jonathan hot on his heels. Another knock sounded as Nancy reached the end of the hall and opened the door.

A girl stood on the other side – plain, but pretty, and wholly unrememberable. She looked shocked at the sight of them standing in Steve’s doorway. Shocked and confused.

“Oh!” The girl looked at each of them quickly before settling on Nancy. She seemed nervous, it made Billy’s jaw clench. “Sorry, I -” She shook her head. “I just didn’t expect anyone else to be here.”

“Ashley?” Nancy looked at the girl in front of them with confusion. “What are you doing here?”

The girl – Ashley – shifted on her feet. “Steve invited me over.”

Billy’s eyes narrowed as he took in the girl. From her bare legs to her teased hair to the backpack slung over her dainty shoulder. The perfect picture of a pretty little Omega ready for a date. It made Billy’s fist clench.

“Steve invited you over?” Nancy asked skeptically, clearly not believing Steve would ever invite this random chick to his house. Especially not *this* Steve Harrington.

“When.” Billy cut in before Ashley could answer Nancy.

She looked from Nancy to Billy, blushing as she took him in and looked him over. And Billy was still dressed for the party he'd been at with Steve – jeans too tight, shirt not buttoned properly, hair a prefect tumble of honey blonde waves. But Billy didn't care that he made her nervous or slick or whatever, he just wanted his question answered. So he asked again, just as aggressively.

“When did he invite you over.”

“Oh, um, earlier today.” She shrugged, hands gripping daintily at the strap of her bag.

“Wrong answer.” Billy growled as he stepped forward.

Ashely took a step back, further from the threshold of the Harrington home, a little fear in her eyes as she took him in. *Good*, he thought to himself. *Let her be scared.*

But then Nancy tugged on his elbow, stopping him in his tracks. “Billy, cool it.”

“She's lying.” He said as he turned toward Nancy and away from the random Omega at the door. “Who the fuck even is this chick?”

“*Ashley.*” Nancy rolled her eyes. “She's in our grade.”

“She is?” Billy asked skeptically, because he had never seen this girl before in his life.

Nancy huffed and Ashley sort of shrank into herself at the comment, at the reality of not being on *Billy Hargrove's* radar. “Yes.” Nancy shook her head, exasperated and probably a little embarrassed for the girl in front of them at Billy’s attitude. “She’s on Yearbook Committee.” Nancy said as though that would ring any bells. “She works after school at the pharmacy –”

Billy and Nancy looked at each other as the words fell from her lips, understanding instantly what the other was thinking. Billy whirled around on the girl, pinning her with his furious stare.

“*What* did you give him.”

Ashley looked up at Billy with shock written all over her features, a little fear too, but Billy was past the point of being able to care about that and Nancy was past the point of stopping him.

“I-I-” She stuttered.

Billy stepped forward into her space. “What *the fuck* did you give him.” He repeated.

“I didn’t give him anything!”

Nancy pressed in beside Billy, staring at Ashley with that hard look Billy hadn't even thought someone like Nancy Wheeler capable of before the whole monster-shit. Firm and unwavering and absolute. "Ashley, tell us the truth or I'll call the cops *and* the Harrington's lawyer and let them figure it out."

The girl paled, actual tears springing to her eyes at Nancy's words as she looked between the two of them. She submitted her gaze, looking down at her shoes, hands twisting in the strap of her backpack. She smelled overwhelming scared and angry and sad. It was then Billy realized he already knew everything he needed to know. Because he could *scent* her clear as day.

"I'm sorry." The girl muttered. "Please don't tell anyone."

"What did you give him?" Nancy pressed, voice still firm.

"Sugar pills." Ashley said softly, eyes still downcast.

"Why?" Jonathan asked from behind them, a desperate edge to his tone. Like he just couldn't understand why anyone would switch out an Alpha's pills the way she had.

"Because she wants Steve to knock her up." Billy answered for her, voice hard and cold. Ashley flinched at the sound. "She's off her pills, I can smell it."

Nancy gasped, looking at the girl like she had slapped Karen Wheeler

in the face. “We’re in *high school*.” Nancy shook her head in shock. “Why would you even want that?”

“It doesn’t matter why she wants it.” Billy answered instead, glaring angrily at the girl. “What matters is what she was willing to do to get it.” Billy scoffed cruelly. “What – were you hoping you’d go into heat and prolong his rut, get knocked up and then his rich parents would force him to marry you?”

Ashley didn’t have to answer for Billy to know it was true. The shame in her eyes said enough.

“I’m sorry.”

Billy leaned forward. “I don’t care.” He growled. “And if I ever see you so much as *sniff* around Steve Harrington ever again, you’ll wish we let the cops deal with you.”

With that, Billy stepped back and slammed the door in her face.

He was angry – more than angry. He was fucking *pissed*.

How dare she? How dare that girl try to take something from Steve like that? Take his future and his choice and his body.

Steve appeared in the hallway suddenly, whining low in his throat and wrapping himself around Billy, like he could sense Billy’s rage –

which, he probably could. So Steve burrowed in close, nuzzling around the glands in his neck as an act of soothing, and Billy let him, let himself be coddled by Steve. He took in a few deep breaths, inhaling Steve's potent, spicy rut scent and willed himself to calm down.

Both Jonathan and Nancy looked just as wild eyed at the confession, just as desperate as Billy felt. Because if Steve hadn't called them, if Billy hadn't come over here when he did... what would have happened?

Billy knew what would have happened – Steve would've been balls deep in *Ashley* and none of them would've been able to do anything about it.

The thought sends Billy spiraling again and Steve moved his mouth to Billy's neck, licking gently over his skin. Billy sighed, bringing his hands up to hold Steve to him, letting his solid body weigh Billy down and ground him. He ran fingers over Steve's shoulders and arms and neck, the rhythmic pattern helping to sooth him and to lull Steve into a boneless heap against him.

"I'm alright, Steve." Billy muttered quietly. "It's all good."

"I think we should stay." Jonathan's voice uncharacteristically firm. "Until his rut's over. We could take shifts if we need to, but I'm not leaving him here alone."

And Billy had absolutely no intention of leaving Steve, but it was nice to know they were all on the same page.

Nancy nodded, eyes still alight with anger. “You’re right. We’ll stay.”

Billy ran his hands up to Steve’s neck, pushing the hair back from his face. His skin was hot now, he was starting to burn. Billy touched around his forehead and neck, looking into Steve’s glassy eyes. “He’s getting hot.” He didn’t look away from the fever flush covering Steve’s skin. “Too hot for this early in the rut. We need to cool him down.”

“Okay.” Nancy nodded firmly, slipping into action mode. “You two go get him in the shower, I’m going to search the kitchen and see if there’s anything we need. Steve’s not the best about keeping it stocked when the kids aren’t here, so I may have to run to the store.”

Jonathan handed Nancy his keys without question and nodded at Billy to signify he was ready. Billy looked to Nancy, who was already awaiting his gaze.

“Lots of water and shit that’s easy to eat – lunch meat, cheese, protein bars, hell even a peanut butter sandwich.” Billy sighed as he moved Steve’s body so they could walk up the stairs. “We don’t know what type of rutter he’ll be, so we don’t know what he’ll be capable of until it happens.”

“Oh, great.” Jonathan intoned.

Nancy just nodded, mentally making a list. “Got it.”

She moved to the kitchen as Billy and Jonathan walked Steve upstairs and into the bathroom next to his bedroom. Once they were under the bright lighting, it was easy to see how flushed and red Steve was already. *Too hot*, Billy's mind supplied yet again.

Billy and Jonathan looked at each other, both thinking the same thing – who was undressing Steve?

It should be Jonathan, because Billy was more than desperate to see Steve naked, because Billy was an Omega in a small room with an Alpha in rut and getting him undressed was just sort of a bad idea. But if Billy didn't help undress Steve, then that had *implications*. Which, Billy didn't want anyone, including Jonathan and Nancy, to think about.

Steve made the decision for them as he began to pull off his shirt and struggle out of his jeans. Jonathan moved to help him step out of them, but left his boxers on for everyone's sake, as Billy held Steve steady. Steve's skin burned where Billy's hands steadied him by the shoulders, he swayed forward toward Billy, pressing his forehead against Billy's shoulder.

"Alright, in you go, Harrington."

Billy gently gripped his shoulders and Jonathan steered him by the ribs. They got him into the tub, laying down with his head resting back against the smooth tile. Billy reached over and started the cold water, adjusting the showerhead until the spray was hitting Steve's chest.

Steve sighed at the feeling of the water, taking in big gulping breaths, eyes fluttering. Billy sat on the bathmat, leaning against the lip of the tub, Jonathan sat on the closed toilet behind them. They were quiet for a while, eyeing Steve and hoping he cooled down or else they really wouldn't have a choice but to bring him to the hospital. Billy would reach his good hand in to feel Steve's skin or the temperature of the water, making sure the fever wasn't still climbing.

Nancy appeared in the doorway with a small pad of paper and a pen in her hand. She leaned in, looking Steve over critically and Billy was struck with the uncomfortable realization that Nancy *would* know what to look for if something was off with Steve. Because she had seen him, intimately. He wondered if Jonathan was sitting behind him uncomfortable and thinking the same thing.

A dark jealousy ripped through him. Because Nancy once had everything that Billy was so fucking *desperate* for and she had tossed it away. She knew what Steve smelled like, what he tasted like, what he felt like inside of her. She'd had Steve and she let him go.

But that was Nancy Wheeler's fucking loss. She didn't deserve someone like Steve, couldn't give him what he needed. Mostly though, Billy felt relieved that she was here. That Nancy knew what to look for in case something was wildly abnormal. Because he'd rather have Steve alive and well than have Steve just to himself.

"How is he?"

"Cooling down." Billy answered, removing his hand from where it had been gently pushing back the wet hair from Steve's face, ignoring

the way Nancy's gaze lingered on him.

"I made a list." She said, not moving past the doorway. "He's got some stuff here, but not enough. I'll run to the store now if you think you'll be alright."

"Yeah," Jonathan nodded. "We're good."

Nancy nodded back, eyes softening as they landed on her boyfriend. "Okay, then. I'll be back."

With that, Nancy turned on her heel and left them in the bathroom.

They sat there for a while, quietly watching Steve. Billy kept checking his temperature, kept adjusting the water, and Steve sort of dozed as his body cooled down from the spike. Jonathan was an easy presence behind him, comforting in his own way. And Billy found he was glad that Byers was here with him instead of Nancy, glad that he wasn't doing this alone. He gave Jonathan a lot of credit - helping out his girl's ex-boyfriend the way he was, no questions asked. That took strength.

Eventually, Steve's eyes blinked open from where he had been dozing beneath the cool spray. He sat up slowly, leaning against the back wall of the tub, realizing where he was for the first time since Billy got here. He looked at Billy, then Jonathan, with clearer eyes than Billy had seen since he'd left the party.

“Hey,” Billy said gently. “You with me?”

Steve nodded, pushing back his wet hair and looking down at his wet boxers. “Fuck – what happened?”

Billy shot a look over his shoulder at Jonathan, who looked wildly out of his depth and just shrugged. “You’re in rut.”

Steve’s head shot up, shock lining his features as he looked at Billy. “I’m what?” Then some of that shock sort of melted into anxiety. “Billy –”

But Billy already knew what had just crossed Steve’s mind. *The kiss*. And now was just not the time to be thinking about that, not the fucking time at all, especially with Jonathan in the room. So he shook his head and gripped Steve’s wrist easily, rubbing his thumb soothingly over the gland there.

“Don’t worry about it.”

Steve continued to look at him with worry in those puppy dog eyes of his and Billy just couldn’t take it. So he stood up and turned the water off now that Steve had cooled down, now that he was lucid.

“Come on, pretty boy. Up and at ‘em.”

He held out a hand for Steve to take, hoping that the more he

projected *everything is normal and fine*, it would become that way. Steve took his hand without hesitation and stood on shaky legs. Jonathan shot up instantly to help get him out of the shower, wrapping a towel around his shoulders and another around his waist.

Steve leaned against Billy as they walked from the bathroom to Steve's bedroom, and that was beginning to feel normal. It would be hard for Billy to go back after Steve's rut was over, hard to pretend like he didn't know what Steve's body felt like draped all over him. But he'd try, for Steve. Because Steve needed to be in his life and Billy didn't really care in what way as long as he was.

They had just stepped over the threshold to Steve's room when he stopped dead, shoulders tense. Billy stopped with him, brows furrowed in confusion as he looked between Steve and Jonathan – who was standing just in the open doorway, eyeing Steve.

Steve growled and then looked guilty that he'd done it at Jonathan. He took in a deep breath, shaking his head. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that."

But Jonathan Byers was as easy going as they get, Billy was coming to know. His calm energy radiated toward them as he gave Steve a small smile, eyes gentle and unguarded. "It's okay, Steve."

But Steve started getting shaky, and his big eyes were staring pleadingly at Jonathan. "I can't." Steve said through accelerated breathing, shaking his head.

Billy reached up without thinking and wrapped a hand around the

back of Steve's neck. The move worked immediately, Steve's shoulders instantly dropping, as did his head. His body swayed a little towards Billy's, so he stepped closer to Steve.

Jonathan just nodded, voice still smooth and soft and quiet. He'd be a good dad someday, Billy thought absently. The kind of dad all three of them had wished for growing up.

"I understand, Steve. It's alright." Jonathan took a step back from the doorway and Steve's breathing began to even out. "I'm going to go downstairs and wait for Nancy, okay?" He caught Billy's eye. "Call if you need anything."

Billy gave him a tilt of his head in understanding then turned back to Steve and sighed. Damn Alphas and their damn territorial instincts. Steve wouldn't let Jonathan into the room and now *Billy* had to get him out of those wet underwear and into bed. Fucking hell.

"Come on, Harrington."

He led Steve over to the messy, unmade bed with his hand still on the back of Steve's neck. Steve went willingly, shuffling over where Billy told him to go, still too close for Billy to move properly. He let go of Steve and grabbed the blanket, hauling it off the bed and tossing it in the corner of the room by the closet.

"What're you doing?"

Steve's speech was starting to get slurry again, which meant they didn't have a lot of time before Steve got over heated and tried to burrow in Billy's neck.

"Get dried off and get into bed."

Billy didn't look at him as he moved around Steve's bed, tossing pillows around and tucking in the top sheet. He moved toward Steve's dressers and dug around for some clothes – Steve wouldn't really be able to wear them once the rut fully hit, but Billy would be damned if he was going to sit in the room with a naked and horny Steve Harrington.

When he turned around, Steve was sitting back against the headboard, sheet pulled over his hips, hair a fluffy drying mess, eyeing Billy with a sharpness that hadn't been there before. Billy ignored it best he could – the last thing he needed was Steve to catch of whiff of interest or slick and try to mount him here and now – so he tossed the clean boxers and t-shirt on the bed and acted like everything was fine.

But, Billy wasn't sure what to say. He wasn't sure what to do, either. So he just held Steve's gaze and tried not to breath in too much through his nose. There was a tingle at the base of his neck that urged him to look away, to tilt his head as a sign of submission, to beg Steve to let him into his bed. But Billy knew better, knew how to ignore the urge to relent, and now wasn't the time to even *think* about giving in.

Before he could make any sort of decision about what to do now that Steve was tucked into bed, Nancy appeared in the doorway. She paused for a moment, letting Steve catch her gaze, then walked in

with her arms full of shit. She moved close to the bed, dropping bottles of water and easy snacks on the nightstand. She thrust a peanut butter sandwich in Steve's hands and started arranging everything so it would be easier for him when the rut really took over.

A part of Billy felt absolutely livid that Steve had let her into his room. That Steve's body recognized her scent and deemed her safe enough to be in his space during a rut. Billy knew it was because they had dated, and he trusted her. It was stupid to feel territorial over a girl who had dumped Steve for the boyfriend that was currently downstairs, but it still burned him up inside anyway. Because in his stupid, pheromone-soaked brain, only *Billy* should be allowed in here with Steve so vulnerable.

But Steve made no move toward Nancy. Didn't pin her with that sharp gaze. Didn't try and scent her as she got too close, or burrow into her skin.

No, he let her into his room and let her near him, but it was Billy who his focus was on. Nancy had his trust, but it was Billy who Steve wanted here with him.

"Eat that." Nancy said, pointing toward the sandwich in his hand. "We'll be downstairs if you need anything." She turned to look at Billy meaningfully over her shoulder. "We'll come to check on you in a little while. Come on, Billy, I need your help."

Nancy moved away from the nightstand and brought a hand up to grab at Billy's elbow, like she had done earlier in the night and to no doubt drag him from the room, but Steve's growl stopped her in her tracks. Her hand froze in the air, hanging above Billy's arm without

making contact, as they both stared at Steve.

His dark eyes were pinned on Nancy's hand – sharp, like they had become since the shower. Steve scent spiked and it made Billy a little lightheaded, the pheromones settling over him like a cloud of perfume and Billy felt his eyes sort of unfocus. Nancy gripped at his elbow harshly and began to pull him away from the bed. Steve growled loudly, leaning forward in bed, shoulders tight.

“Enough, Steve.” Nancy said firmly, tugging Billy toward the door.

Her voice cleared Billy's head and he looked back at Steve as he followed Nancy out of the room. “I want three of those water bottles empty by the time I come back.”

Steve just watched him go, the sharpness melting from his eyes. He nodded, cheek still bulging a little from the peanut butter sandwich he'd yet to finish eating, and reached for one of the waters Nancy had placed on his nightstand.

Nancy shut the door behind them and looked up at Billy with crossed arms.

“What.” He sighed, rubbing his good hand over his tired eyes.

“Is this going to be a problem for you?”

Billy rolled his eyes, “No, Wheeler, this isn’t going to be a problem.”

Nancy held his gaze for a moment before she nodded. “Good. Because I don’t know how long he’ll let me in there and we’re going to need you.”

“I’m fine.” Billy said emphatically. “He’s just got a particularly potent scent, is all. I’ll be fine.”

“Okay.” Nancy said easily but her eyes still looked at him like she was attempting to figure out if he was lying to her. “Just making sure.”

“Come on,” Billy moved away from Steve’s door and toward the stairs. “We’ll have to check on him in a little while and keep an eye on that temperature. We also need to come up with a fucking back up plan in case this doesn’t work out the way we want it to.”

Nancy followed him down the stairs and into the kitchen where Jonathan was seated in one of the tall chairs at the island counter. He was eating a sandwich and looked up as they came into the room.

“All good?” Jonathan asked easily, no judgement or implications in his eyes.

Billy was really starting to like Byers more and more.

“All good.” He nodded back.

“For now.” Nancy cut in, giving Billy a look as she leaned against the countertop across from Jonathan.

Byers looked between the two of them as he finished his food, taking in Nancy’s tense shoulders and Billy’s dilated pupils. His energy and scent were particularly calm for a Beta, and it helped bring Billy back down from the rush Steve’s pheromones had given him, evening him back out.

Billy took a deep breath and rubbed a hand across his tired eyes. “I can stay tonight.” He started. “But I’m gonna have to sneak home at some point.”

Nancy nodded, “Yeah, same. I can come back after I show my face, but my mom would freak if she knew I was out all night.”

“I’ll stay.” Jonathan said easily. “I called my mom and told her what was going on, so, at least one adult is aware of what’s happening.” He shrugged. “She said she’ll come over to check on him tomorrow, and keep the kids out of our hair. She’s gonna tell ‘em Steve has the flu.”

Billy didn’t know Joyce Byers all that well, but she seemed like the kind of person who helped because she wanted to, because it was right to do so. Jonathan seemed to have that trait as well. He was grateful for them – the Byers. They helped even when they didn’t have to. He appreciated kindness in that way, how freely given it was by some people. Because kindness was a currency Billy hadn’t had much of in his life.

“Tell her thank you.” Billy found himself saying, looking sincerely into Jonathan’s sleepy eyes.

“You should eat something, Billy.” Nancy said as she slapped together some cold cuts and cheese on a bread. “It’s late, we’re all tired, and I know you and Steve were at a party earlier. Eat something before you pass out on us.”

Billy eyed the sandwich she had made and held out for him, hesitating only momentarily before swiping it from her hand and taking a bite. He felt instantly better as he ate, accepting the juice box Jonathan slid his way. Billy rolled his eyes, but took it.

“You two are only feeding me because I’m an Omega.” He narrowed his gaze as he looked between them.

“I mean, that’s not the *only* reason.” Nancy said as she put together her own sandwich. “But your scent gets funny when you’re stressed out and it gives me anxiety. So shut up and eat your damn sandwich so we can go upstairs and make sure Steve hasn’t melted.”

Billy held her glare, watching as she raised a singular brow and looked at him meaningfully. He snorted, shaking his head and tearing off a chunk of sandwich aggressively with his teeth. “I’m starting to like you more and more, Wheeler.”

Nancy tried to curb a smile as Jonathan whine out a, “Hey!”

Billy turned to wink at Jonathan. “You too, Byers.”

This was absolutely *not* where Billy thought he'd be – standing in Steve Harrington's fancy kitchen with both Jonathan *and* Nancy smiling at him, feeding him, helping him, while Steve was in rut upstairs. But, here he was anyway.

Notes for the Chapter:

everyone in the comments who guessed Stevie-boy was in rut... you right!! poor Billy just so unprepared lol

13. Chapter 13

The last couple days have been an absolute *nightmare* for Billy.

And while that sounds dramatic, feels ridiculous to even think in the privacy of his own head, it's true. Because Billy has never been as constantly fucking horny as he's been the last few days taking care of Steve outside of a heat. And, even in rut, Steve is a tactile kind of guy. Which means Billy's skin is just constantly on fire and smelling like the pretty boy he's basically in love with.

Steve's scent is... a lot.

Billy had thought that before, has honestly thought that for as long as he's known Steve, but his rut scent is just different. More intense and potent and *lingering*. Billy can feel it in his fucking nose, can feel the way it settles over his skin and burrows into his brain like a physical thing.

Nancy hadn't been wrong for pulling him out of Steve's bedroom that first night and making sure he would be capable of doing this. Because there had been a thousand times since that night where Billy's eyes had sort of glazed over when he walked into Steve's room, dick chubbing up instantly, slick dampening his briefs. A thousand times he wanted to just turn around and walk out or slid himself between Steve's naked body and the ruined sheets.

The worst of it had been early on. Late into the morning of that first night, Nancy and Jonathan passed out on the couch downstairs. Billy had napped briefly before they had fallen asleep, staying awake in shifts to check on Steve. He had brought more water up, because

Billy's brain could not turn off the part that was desperate to care for Steve, no matter how much he'd like to.

Of course, as soon as Billy had opened the door and entered the bedroom, Steve mounted him.

Literally grabbed him once he'd gotten close enough and hauled Billy down into the bed. The scent in the room had disoriented him, which was why Steve had even been able to tug him down so easily. Because rut or no, Billy was stronger than Steve, and he wouldn't be able to put Billy anywhere he didn't want to be under normal circumstances. Apparently, his brain and body *wanted* to be in Steve's bed – which, was the least shocking thing about this whole experience, honestly.

Steve had plastered himself over Billy's body once he was face down on the bed – burning hot and naked and sweating. Billy could feel him through layers of clothes, could feel the heat radiating, could feel how fucking hard Steve was as he rubbed his hips against Billy's ass. Steve whined, low and loud in Billy's ear, desperate and needy. He wrapped his arms around Billy's chest, face rubbing against Billy's neck, marking him.

It wasn't as aggressive as Billy would've assumed a mounting in rut would be. Steve was basically *cradling* him, holding Billy to his body and scenting him intensely. And while Steve's hard cock was rutting eagerly against Billy's ass, nothing about the moment scared Billy or made the urge to fight kick in. If anything, he wanted to *let* Steve have him. But that would make him no better than that fucking girl that had put Steve in this position, so Billy had pried Steve off him as gently as he could, shushing Steve's whining and glazed puppy eyes.

The sheets that Billy's face had been firmly planted in were *doused* in Steve's rut scent. Heady and intoxicating and powerful enough that Billy was going to throw them the fuck out once this was over, because if Steve kept them, Billy would be naked in no time upon entering the bedroom.

The smell of the sheets under his nose had caused him to slick. The feeling of Steve's body pinning him to the bed had caused him to slick. The feeling of Steve frantically rutting that cock against him had caused him to slick. So, needless to say, Billy's briefs were fucking *drenched*, and his cock was actually throbbing where it was trapped in his jeans, and Steve was making these punched out little whines that made Billy shiver.

Once Billy had managed to wiggle out and was no longer face down on the mattress, and actually looking at Steve, he reached a shaky hand up to Steve's forehead. He pushed the hair back from Steve's face, watching as his eyelashes fluttered at the contact, shoulders slumping at little, body losing some of its tension at Billy's touch. Steve was hot. Burning hot. Steve was in full rut now.

"Billy..." Steve whined, pushing forward to rub his cheek along Billy's neck.

Billy felt his eyes droop at the feeling of Steve's burning skin against his neck. Fuck, he'd have to scrub himself raw before going home if Steve kept scenting him so thoroughly.

"You're alright, Steve." He muttered softly, hand gripping the back of Steve's neck in a soothing way.

Steve licked over his throat, panting heavily against Billy's skin, and Billy shivered at the feeling. Then Steve licked over Billy's gland and he felt a pulse run through his body, felt the throb beat in time with his rapid heartrate as the feeling settled in his cock and in his ass.

"I..." Steve said around panting breaths, tongue dragging *deliciously* over Billy's gland. "I can't." He whined. "I-I can't, Billy. It's too much."

Billy squeezed his eyes shut as Steve tried to crawl closer to him, holding him back best he could. Steve made that desperate noise against Billy's throat again, but Billy still held him back. Because if Steve managed to pin him down again, Billy didn't think he'd have the strength to get out from under him a second time. Not with the pheromones saturating the air, not with Steve's needy noises or the way he held so tightly to Billy.

He needed to leave. Now. Before he did something that would make Steve hate him later. Something that he'd hate *himself* for.

"You're just gonna have to try, pretty boy." Billy pulled Steve away from his skin by the back of the neck, looking firmly into Steve's glassy eyes. "Okay? You gonna be a good Alpha and try for me, Steve?"

Okay, Billy absolutely needed to leave *right now*. Steve's scent and skin and pheromones were getting to him. Why the fuck were these words choosing to leave his mouth right now? If Steve managed to remember any of this once the cycle was over, Billy was packing up the Camaro and leaving town.

But Steve's pupils just dilated further at the words. His scent spiking hard enough to pull a gasp from Billy's lips. Steve nodded frantically; the hands gripping Billy's shoulders turned painful as he swayed forward into Billy's space.

"I wanna be a good Alpha. I'll be good for you, Billy. I promise, *please*." Steve groaned a little and dropped his forehead to Billy's shoulder, rubbing against him like he was trying to relieve a headache, like he was trying to burrow his scent into Billy's skin. "It hurts." Steve muttered quietly into Billy's body.

He rubbed his hands down Steve's bare back, the skin almost hurting his palms with how hot it was. But he soothed Steve the best he could, marking him a bit with his scent and hoping that would help. If he'd been off his blockers, it would probably help more, but there was nothing to be done for that.

And then, a thought struck Billy.

It wiggled and wormed from the back of his mind and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't think of anything else. It would help, he knew it would, but it would be crossing some major line between them. But with Steve's words in his ears and his scent in his nose, Billy found that he just didn't care.

He sighed, squeezing Steve before pulling back entirely, ignoring Steve's whine. "Can you stay right here for me, Steve?"

Steve nodded sort of frantically again and Billy nodded back, slower and more deliberate.

“Drink this water for me and I’ll be right back, okay?”

Steve accepted the water bottle and watched Billy with sharp eyes as he tracked Billy across the room. Billy waited until Steve cracked it open and took a sip before moving again. He shuffled through Steve’s dresser drawers pulling out some clothes before moving toward the door. Steve let out a growl – different from one he’d used on Jonathan and Nancy, lighter and less threatening. A warning.

Billy looked at Steve, ignoring the way the growl had caused his skin to prick and even more slick to leak. “I’ll be right back. Finish that bottle.”

He slipped from Steve’s bedroom and into the bathroom as quickly and quietly as he was capable. His throat was red, rubbed raw from Steve’s light stubble and lips and heat. His pupils were shot to shit, a raging blush covering his skin, and he was breathing heavier than he’d been before sauntering into Steve’s room.

Billy quickly stripped out of his clothes, standing naked in Steve’s bathroom, heart beating wildly in his chest. He placed his slick-soaked underwear on the rim of the sink and took his heavy cock in hand.

Even the touch of his own hand was too much. Billy was honestly convinced he had never been this turned on in his fucking life. He groaned at the first touch before reigning himself in. He couldn’t let Steve hear. Not unless he wanted Steve to break the door down and fuck him on the bathroom floor. Billy had to remind himself that he *didn’t* want that, even if his body was thoroughly disagreeing with

him.

Billy jerked himself quickly, fucking into his own fist and gasping quietly at the feeling. His eyes were squeezed shut and all he could picture was Steve looking at him flushed and willing and saying *I wanna be a good Alpha. I'll be good for you, Billy. I promise, please* in that fucked-out voice – over and over. The most arousing fucking thing he had ever heard.

Fuck, he wanted Steve.

Wanted to rub himself all over those dirty sheets and imprint his scent on them just as heavily. Wanted Steve to pin him down and fuck him *hard* and *deep* as he licked over Billy's neck. Wanted to pin Steve to the bed as he slid down *slow* on that big fucking cock, wanted to take his knot and show Steve that no one else would ever be right for him. Not like Billy was.

Billy came, hard and panting, all over the underwear on the sink's edge. He stroked his cock a few more times, watching as more and more come spilled across the ruined fabric. His come mixed in with his slick, wet and potent and fucking *obscene*.

He took a few deep breathes as he came down from his orgasm, bracing himself against the tiled wall. When Billy felt like he could move without collapsing, he cleaned himself up and stepped into Steve's borrowed clothes. The sweatpants were tight around his thighs, but they fit well enough, the soft Hawkins Basketball shirt fit a little less well, but, it was either this or walk back into Steve's room shirtless and that was just asking for trouble.

So Billy grabbed the briefs from the sink and slunk quietly back into the bedroom. Steve was seated exactly where Billy had left him, empty water bottle on the bed beside him. His gaze zeroed in on Billy as soon as he entered the room, his nostrils flaring and pupils going wide.

Billy stayed by the door, tossing Steve the ruined briefs. He turned quickly and left the room, hearing Steve growl – louder than it'd ever been – as he shut the door behind him.

Billy went home not long after the encounter with Steve. Woke Nancy and Jonathan and said he'd be back in a couple hours.

He needed a minute to clear his head.

It had been early enough for Billy to sneak into his house, take his pills, and jump in the shower. He ate breakfast with his dad, Susan, and Max and waited for Neil to take Susan to work before going back to Steve's. Max knew something was up, but she kept herself from asking Billy questions and for that he was grateful. Billy wasn't sure he had it in him to try and explain this situation to anyone right now, not with the mess of emotions and *feelings* and arousal swirling inside him at any given moment.

The next few days followed in that sort of pattern. Billy and Nancy would leave in the early morning before their parents would be

awake and snuck into their homes, then returning to Steve's where they spent the rest of the day and night. Jonathan stayed the entire time, because his sole parent actually knew what was happening, and Joyce popped in to check on them while Billy and Nancy were gone.

They all found Steve easier to deal with after Billy jerked off into his fucking underwear and threw them at the guy. Because Steve was deep into his rut after receiving that and less aware of his surroundings. They could go in and check his temperature, force some water down his throat, a snack or two, without much complaint, though the potential of seeing something inappropriate was at an all-time high.

Steve always seemed to know when it was Billy in the room. Swayed toward him, tried to scent him, whined, but nothing more than that.

No more mounting or growling, sadly.

But it was better that way, Billy reminded himself. Because Steve was in rut, he'd mount any Omega. And that stupid, soft part of Billy that Neil had tried so hard to stamp out, wanted it to *mean* something. Wanted Steve to want *him*.

So, it was for the best, really. And after the rut was over, they could forget that Steve had kissed him, that he had tried to mount Billy, that Steve had promised to be a good Alpha for him. They could go back to being friends, go back to driving around and fucking with the kids and ignoring all the horrible shit life kept throwing at them. Go back to normal.

Robin showed up on the third day.

Billy had gone home a couple hours earlier and was just coming back when he saw a weird car in the driveway next to Jonathan's. For one heart-stopping second Billy thought Steve's parents had returned unexpectedly, but the car was nowhere near nice enough to belong to Mr. and Mrs. Harrington.

Jonathan was leaning against the kitchen island talking to Robin when Billy entered, freshly showered and in Steve's clothes, as he was every morning he returned. Robin looked him up and down as he stormed into the kitchen and Billy felt his eyes narrow as he took in another Omega in Steve's house.

"What're you doing here?" He asked rudely.

Robin didn't glare back at him, but she crossed her arms over her chest like she was ready to plant herself to that spot for the rest of forever if it'd piss Billy off. Which, in turn, made Billy *more* annoyed.

"She literally just got here." Jonathan said diplomatically, attempting to ignore the tension between them. "I was just filling her in."

"You know," Robin started, directed towards Billy. "Since Steve is *my*

friend, too.”

“She shouldn’t be here.” Billy said to Jonathan.

“Um, hello.” Robin waved her hands obnoxiously. “I’m right here.”

Billy clenched his jaw and turned to face her directly. “You shouldn’t be here.”

“Oh, and why’s that, Hargrove?”

“Because you’re an Omega.” Billy said harshly. “And Steve’s in *rut*.”

Robin held his gaze for a moment, shoulders tense, lips tightening like she was keeping herself from saying something. Eventually she let out a sigh but didn’t look away from Billy’s eyes. “It’s not like that between us.”

Billy shrugged, “Doesn’t matter. We can’t risk him hurting you.”

Jonathan looked at Billy, and he knew what Jonathan as trying to convey with his eyes. *You’re an Omega too and we let you in there alone with him.* But Billy could easily defend himself from Steve, Robin couldn’t.

And that was true. That was a valid reason for Billy not wanting her

here. But it wasn't the actual reason.

Really, Billy just didn't want Steve around another Omega when he was this vulnerable, when he wasn't in full control of himself. He doubted Steve would hurt Robin, but the thought of Steve trying to mount her would send him into a blind rage that Billy wasn't sure he'd come back from.

Because Steve *wasn't* his, but during this rut, Billy's body refused to believe that.

Billy's job - as his friend or Omega or *whatever* - was to keep Steve safe. To keep him healthy and strong and get him through this complicated cycle. He couldn't do that if there were other Omegas Steve could potentially want or need.

If Steve reacted to Robin the way he reacted to Billy... it'd break him.

He had been living in a fantasy bubble the last few days, one where Steve wanted Billy, *only* Billy. Where Billy's scent soothed him and excited him. Where Billy was the only Omega Steve was this desperate for.

Robin threatened that.

"It's not like I'm about to storm up there and bang down the door." Robin said evenly, a little less angry than she had been a minute ago. "I just wanted to make sure he was okay. It's not like him to just go

MIA and when I saw Jonathan's car, I knew something was up.”

And Billy wanted to be cruel, wanted to ask – *how would you even know?* But that was unfair. Steve was allowed to have other relationships, other friends. Steve deserved to have people who cared about him. The rut pheromones and Steve's scent were just making him overprotective and territorial. So Billy forced himself to chill the fuck out. Because Robin was Steve's friend and Steve didn't need Billy ruining that for him by being a hormonal jackass.

“Let Jonathan make sure he's not doing something that would scar you for life.” He looked to Jonathan quickly before settling his gaze back on Robin. “If he's not too deep in it, go up and check on him, but you're not staying up there long. Got it?”

Robin held his gaze, her eyes less sharp than they'd been before. She nodded. “Alright. Fine.”

Jonathan looked between the two of them before slinking out of the kitchen and up the stairs. Robin was looking at Billy like she wanted to say something, fiddling with the clunky bracelets on her wrists. It was awkward, but Billy didn't know how to make it better. Didn't know what to say or do to get rid of the tension in his body. It probably wouldn't subside until the other Omega was out of Steve's house. Billy was mentally calling for Nancy to hurry the fuck up and get back here so he didn't have to deal with this shit.

“Just spit it the fuck out.” Billy said harshly.

Robin looked at him wide eyed for a moment before blinking the

startled expression and settling back into her natural look of unaffected boredom. Billy knew it was at least partially an act, a mask she wore. Billy knew all about those.

“Things could never be like that between Steve and I.” She said firmly.

Billy crossed his arms over his chest in a way that looked both casual and threatening. “Sure.”

Robin glared at him. “I mean it. I need you to hear what I’m saying, dipstick.”

“Doesn’t mean shit when he’s like this.” Billy shot back.

Robin rolled her eyes in a way that instantly reminded him of Max. “Oh, *fuck* off.” She shook her head and looked at him like he was the world’s biggest idiot. “Get your head out of your ass, Billy.”

Jonathan appeared before Billy could growl back at her. “He’s okay. You can go up.”

Robin threw one last narrowed look at Billy before stalking past Jonathan up the stairs. Billy followed, because there was just no way he’d be able to sit downstairs while she was up here alone with him. But Billy waited at the door, not entering the room.

He needed to see how Steve would react to another Omega's presence, to *Robin*. He needed to know.

Robing slid into the room, waving her hand in front of her face at the smell, nose wrinkling. That, at least, was a good sign for Billy. If Robing couldn't stand Steve's rut scent, there wasn't much hope for them as a couple. Steve was lying curled on his side, facing the door, the sheet just barely pulled up high enough to keep his modesty.

She didn't sit on the bed. And Billy was grateful for that. Instead, Robin dropped into a crouch and looked at Steve's glassy eyes and matted hair and flushed skin.

"Hey, dingus." She said softly, *fondly*, and that made something complicated flutter in Billy's chest. "You okay?"

Steve let out a huffy breath, nodding a little as he looked at her. But that was all.

He didn't lunge toward her once she was close enough, didn't haul her into the bed the way he had with Billy, didn't try to mount her or scent her neck, didn't try to mark her as his. Steve didn't do any of those things.

Instead, he closed his eyes and inhaled deep, reaching out for her wrist and bringing it to her nose the way he had done with Nancy. Once he took in his fill of her scent, he let her go.

Robin didn't try to touch him. Didn't run her hands through his hair, didn't brush her fingers over the flushed skin of his cheeks, didn't do anything at all but crouch beside his bed and look him over. She didn't even hand him a water or snack from the bedside table, because that could be seen as providing for him.

No, Robin stayed there for a few moments before standing and moving away from the bed. Steve watched her go, tracked her movements with tired eyes, but that was it.

Billy felt his heart beat oddly in his chest.

Robin didn't seem surprised to see him standing at the doorway. She just stopped in front of him and gave him an unimpressed look. "See?" She said quietly. "I told you. We don't like each other like that. We're *friends*. Nothing to worry about."

Billy grabbed her wrist before she made it fully into the hallway. "I wasn't wrong." He said with a bite. "Alphas in rut can be unpredictable, especially during first cycles like this. We don't know how Steve will react, even if it's *not like that* between you."

Robin looked up at him from their slight height difference, grey-blue eyes searching his. "You'd know better than anyone about that, wouldn't you."

Billy dropped her wrist like she had burned him, face closing off and turning angry. But Robin looked calm as she walked away from him, leaving him in the open doorway of Steve's room.

Robing hung around for a while and Nancy finally returned from the Wheeler's – thank fuck. The girls talked and Jonathan cooked, and Billy began a load of laundry.

It was weird, and domestic, and absolutely wild to Billy that they were in Steve's house doing it. Because it sort of felt like they were a pack, a real one.

He knew that was stupid – because they were all barely friends, bonded together through trauma and Steve fucking Harrington, but here they were.

Billy stayed around Jonathan while Robin was there. Jonathan's easy scent made Billy feel calm, settled the anxiety he felt every time he looked at the other Omega. What the fuck had she meant? Did Steve talk about him to her? Did she *know*?

Too many people knew about him. Too many people knowing was how secrets got out. Billy knew the repercussions of secrets getting out – he was stuck in fucking *Indiana* because of it.

So he flanked Jonathan to calm himself down and did some household chores that Steve obviously neglected to take his mind off all the thoughts swirling in his head. Nancy went up to check on

Steve next, then Jonathan a little while later. Robin decided to leave before it was Billy's turn to go back up there.

She hugged Nancy goodbye after exchanging phone numbers and came around the couch to give Jonathan a high five. She passed Billy on her way to the door, swiftly grabbing him by the t-shirt and tugging him along with her. Once they were out of earshot, the front door wide open and ready for Robin to go, she turned towards him with a glint in her eye that reminded him of the kids.

Robin punched him in the shoulder, hard but playful, and shook her head. "Don't be such an idiot, okay?"

And with that, she left.

Bounced down the front steps and to her parents' car, flipping Billy off as she pulled out of the driveway. Billy closed the door after she drove away and pushed away thoughts of what the fuck she could possibly mean as he went upstairs for his turn to check in on Steve.

He was right where Robin had left him a couple hours ago – laying on his side, eyes tired and dazed. But Steve perked up immediately as Billy entered the room. Lifted his head from the mattress and made grabby hands at Billy as soon as he got close enough.

Billy hadn't allowed himself to get too close, not like the first time. But Steve was less frenzied now than he had been then. Now he was soft and syrupy slow, blinking heavy and fighting the exhaustion he must feel.

Billy rested the back of his hand against Steve's forehead to check his temperature and Steve sighed at the contact, hand reaching up to grip at Billy's wrist to keep him there. Steve was starting to cool down – maybe another day of all this before Steve's cycle began wrapping up. Thank fuck. Because Billy honestly didn't know how much more prolonged arousal he could take – his dick was starting to hurt with how much he'd been getting off.

Steve made a sad little noise when Billy removed his hand from his forehead, tugging Billy's wrist to his nose and inhaling deeply. Steve's whole chest expanded with every pull, tongue licking over the gland there to mark him up.

Billy felt himself flush a little at the feeling – at the *display*. Because Steve had definitely *not* reacted this way with Robin, who was another Omega that he was close to. He had barely moved when Robin entered the room, barely even acknowledged she had even been there until she was crouched right in front of him. And even then, Steve hadn't made even a fraction of the effort has he was now with Billy.

There was an obvious difference between the way Steve reacted with Billy and with everyone else. The thought must've done something to his scent because Steve moaned, eyes fluttering as he inhaled along the delicate skin of Billy's wrist, free hand reaching down below the sheet – and it was time to go. Billy would analyze all of this once Steve's body wasn't pumping out *fuck me* pheromones.

So he gently extracted himself from Steve's grip, reaching down quickly to push the hair back from Steve's face, hoping the scent mark would linger a little while. Steve hummed, eyes closing at the

feeling.

Billy moved away as Steve began to fuck his fist, the sheet dipping lower and lower. He closed the door before the sheet had dropped entirely, breathing in the clean air of the hallway to clear his head. Billy's dick throbbed a little in his borrowed sweatpants, tenting them a little obscenely.

He dropped his head back against the wall behind him, attempting to calm himself down. When that didn't work, Billy slunk off to the bathroom to jerk off as quickly as he could, Steve's spicy scent still in his nose. At this point, Steve's bathroom smelled more like Billy's fucking *come* than it did Steve. He'd have to deep clean in here before the rut was over.

That was a problem for future-Billy to deal with. *This* Billy bit his lip hard enough to hurt as he stripped his aching cock and desperately hoped Steve's rut ended soon.

He wasn't sure how much more of this he could take.

Notes for the Chapter:

some ~things~ were supposed to go down in this chapter, but it became just too long. so... next chapter!

14. Chapter 14

It was early, dawn not yet breaking over Hawkins, the sky still a deep darkness littered with too many stars. Billy watched as Nancy extracted herself from Jonathan's embrace and slipped out of the house, running home before her parents knew she had ever been gone – just like she had done every morning for the last couple of days.

Billy should leave too. Should go show his face at home to avoid suspicion. But Neil hadn't caught on yet, even if Max sort of had, and she had promised to cover for him if he didn't make it back in time. So far, he had. Left around the same time as Nancy every morning and slipped home.

But today, Billy was tired.

He had fallen asleep on the couch at some point while Jonathan had been on watch. Jonathan must've switched with Nancy a couple of hours ago, seeing as he was currently passed out in the downstairs guest bedroom.

Instead of waking Jonathan up and following Nancy out of the door, Billy started the coffee maker, yawning and rubbing his eyes with the heels of his hands. He could miss one morning, Max would cover for him, make it convincing. He would just go home and act all hung over at some point later today, it would be worth his father's disappointed glare for these few minutes of absolute quiet.

Billy poured himself a cup of coffee and helped himself to a bowl of cereal, swallowing down the little pills he had started keeping in the

Camaro after sneaking home that first night. The house was calm as he ate his breakfast, light just beginning to change the sky.

He used to get up this early to surf before school. The beach absolutely empty, the sky a hazy purple blue that faded into pinks as the sun woke up the rest of the world. It was just Billy out there on those early mornings. Just Billy and his surfboard and his wandering thoughts.

He missed it, more than he had realized.

Because it had been all yelling and anger when they left. Max had thrown a massive tantrum the whole week it took them to pack up the house and hit the road, and Billy had been just so *mad* at her that his anger had sort of swallowed him whole. He hadn't really even had time to miss California, not until later. The missing came once they had actually settled into Hawkins, after Billy's fight with Steve.

And then, he had gotten comfortable. He apologized to Steve and slowly became friends with him, with the others. Billy had been so wrapped up in his feelings for Steve Harrington, and the nightmare shit that plagued Hawkins like a wound that wouldn't heal, that Billy hadn't even really had time to miss home.

He did though. He did miss it.

But it was different now. Because now when he thought of going home, he sort of pictured other people there with him.

Steve. Max. Maybe some of the others.

And that was... not something he had factored into his plan.

Because the plan had always been get in and get out. Graduate, save up enough money to leave Neil, and head back home.

Now he wasn't so sure.

One thing at a time, Billy reminded himself as he stood from the island counter and put his bowl and mug in the sink. Billy still had a whole fucking year here in Indiana, no use in getting ahead of himself.

So he gathered up an armful of shit and slunk up the stairs to look in on Steve. Jonathan was zonked out and Nancy would be back in a couple of hours, no use in waiting if he wasn't going home.

Billy adjusted the bundle of shit in his arms as he reached Steve's door, he needed to replace the water bottles, leave a few more protein bars and try to cajole Steve into actually eating them. He knocked on the door and entered without really waiting for a response – they hadn't really needed to in the last couple days. But Billy stopped in the doorway when he saw Steve was sitting up in bed, sheet around his waist, hair a wild fluffy mess, eyes tired.

Steve's head shot up as Billy opened the door, a healthy flush still over his skin but his eyes were clear. "Hey." He managed with a hoarse voice.

“Hey.” Billy said softly back, entering the room fully and closing the door behind him. He placed the items in his hands on the bedside table and blinked back against the way the potent smell in the room made him hazy. “You’re lucid.”

Steve nodded, rubbing hands over his face. “Yeah.” He looked at Billy’s raised brow and sighed. “I can still feel it lingering a little, but... I’m good. I’m *me*.”

Billy nodded, crossing his arms as he looked down at Steve’s bare shoulders and chest and the messy sheets wrapped haphazardly around him. He tried not to flush at the sight of his ruined underwear amongst the bedding, ripped and torn and absolutely *covered* in come. In *Steve’s* come.

Don’t fucking go there, Billy growled to himself. The last thing he needed was for Steve to smell his reaction to the sight of them and spiral back into rut.

So he forced his gaze away from the incriminating evidence of Billy’s apparently not-so-secret crush on Steve Harrington and eased himself down on the bed in front of Steve. He knew that he shouldn’t be doing this at all – no matter how lucid Steve was now, Nancy’s voice reprimanded in the back of his head. But Steve smelled so fucking good and Billy was weak.

His omega instinct was to nest. Was to curl up around his rutting Alpha and help him through, calm him, sate him. It didn’t matter that Steve wasn’t his Alpha, wasn’t his mate, didn’t matter that Billy was shit a being an Omega and didn’t know the first thing about caring

for an Alpha – his body didn't agree with what his mind knew to be the truth and was a fucking traitorous little bitch. So he sat on the sweat and come covered sheets while wearing Steve's borrowed clothes and tried to just ignore the way his body responded to being in a room, *in a bed*, with a rutting Alpha that he wanted so desperately. Pushed all that away because he needed to check in with Steve now that he was talking, needed to make sure he wasn't injured or hungry or about to go into fucking ketosis or something from barely eating.

Steve's shoulders tensed when Billy sat down, body going completely still. The dark flush was still staining his pale skin and Billy traced the color from Steve's cheeks and ears down his neck to where it went patchy and speckled over his pecs. Steve's rut scent intensified, and Billy was forced to close his eyes and turn his head away, hands clenched over his knees to keep from reaching out and touching Steve's bare skin.

"Sorry." Steve said quietly, voice rough.

Billy shook his head, "No need, pretty boy." He started breathing through his mouth instead of his nose. "Just wanted to check in and make sure you were okay."

"Have you been here the whole time?" Steve's hands fisted in the sheet covering him, but he didn't make any move toward Billy and that told him that Steve's estimation was correct, he was basically out of rut.

"For the most part." He answered with a shrug. "Yeah."

Steve nodded, eyes moving from Billy to his clenched hands and then quickly to the ruined slick-soaked underwear in view next to them. Billy pretended not to notice, no need for Steve to get fucking embarrassed about it now, seeing as Billy had been the one to give him the damn underwear in the first place.

“What do you remember?” Billy asked casually, the words out of his mouth before he could even think about it, pulling Steve’s attention away from whatever embarrassment he was feeling.

“Bits and pieces.” Steve shrugged, gaze low and away from Billy’s eyes. “I didn’t actually think cycles were like this, you know. Thought that’s just what they said in Health class to scare us, like worst-case scenario shit.”

“It’s usually not.” Billy said easily, reassuringly. “For most people a cycle like that is worst-case scenario.”

Steve huffed self-deprecatingly. “Lucky me, huh?”

“It shouldn’t be like this for you all the time.” Billy found himself pressing. “It’s probably only because this was your first real rut, and you were knocked out of your cycle.” He looked at Steve seriously in the eye. “What’s the last thing you remember?”

Steve blush deepened as he blinked away from Billy’s intense gaze, sighing as he looked up at the ceiling. “I remember the girl, if that’s what you’re asking. I know what she did, I heard you guys.”

Billy nodded sort of absently, pushing away the anger he felt at the thought of *Ashley*. "I'm sure Nancy's gonna wanna talk to you about it, so, fair warning."

"*Nancy*, huh?" Steve said around a tired smile, letting his gaze fall back on Billy.

He rolled his eyes, "*Wheeler*, whatever."

"No, no, please, tell me all about how *that* happened."

Billy felt his ears sort of flush and he knew they were giving him away by turning red. "She made me a sandwich." He shrugged, trying to play it off.

But Steve saw through him, just as he always did. He smirked a little around tired eyes. "I'm sure she did."

"Look," Billy found himself getting defensive. "Her and Jonathan are literally so square that it's actually painful to be around them sometimes, but... they're alright."

"Yeah," Steve smiled softly. "They are."

"I mean, I'm not planning on making it an ongoing thing or whatever, but we did spend the last four days alone together and no one's dead, so."

“All of you?” Steve asked, shock sort of lining his tone. “You all stayed here? For me?”

Billy looked at Steve like the idiot was out of his fucking mind. “What the fuck do you mean – *of course* we all stayed here. Some psycho basically incapacitated you and you’re here alone.” He shook his head, eyes narrowed. “The fuck is wrong with you, thinking we were just gonna leave you here like that?”

Steve chewed on the inside of his cheek; fingers still twisted in the dirty sheet covering his lower half. Billy wanted to keep going, wanted to go on about how obviously they’d never leave Steve to go through something like that alone, regardless of what *Ashley* had done. But the vulnerable look on Steve’s face made him hold off and bite his tongue. It was quiet between them until Steve eventually spit out whatever he’d been struggling to say.

“Why did you stay though?” Steve asked quietly.

And Billy knew that he was asking more than that. Knew that Steve was asking why he had put himself in actual danger being around a newly presented Alpha in rut. Why he would risk getting in trouble with his dad by staying out so long. Why he gave Steve his fucking slick-soaked underwear. Why he was trusting Steve not to hurt him while he sat on Steve’s bed in Steve’s damn clothes while Steve was technically still in rut.

“Because...”

Billy started, swallowing around the anxiety bubbling up his throat and the wild thumping of his heart. It was either address it now or later this week – and Billy wasn't totally confident he'd be able to organically create a conversation that would allow them to talk about this. So, he pushed back the nervous sinking of his gut and the pounding of his heart, and looked at Steve right in the eye.

There were so many things that Billy was absolute shit at, but faking his way through any situation with major confidence was certainly not one of them.

"Because you kissed me."

The air shifted between them as the words left Billy's mouth. A tension taking over both of their bodies as Steve looked at him with wide eyes. *Fear*, Billy realized. Steve was afraid. And Billy didn't like that *at all*. Felt like a hot knife between his ribs at the thought of Steve being afraid of him.

"You were in rut, I get it." He pushed on, wanting to wipe that look right off Steve's face. "It's okay."

Because being in rut was a completely valid excuse to have kissed an Omega. So Billy acknowledging Steve was in rut at the time made it so that he couldn't be condemned for kissing another boy. It was just biology. He had hoped by recognizing that, it would take the look of fear out of Steve's eyes.

And it did.

A look of relief washed over Steve and Billy tried really hard not to feel disappointed at that. Tried not to feel like the world was cracking open and swallowing him whole.

But then Steve looked at him, nervous but determined, like he was gearing up for a fight. Like he was steadying himself for when Billy hit him.

“I kissed you because of the rut.” Steve said purposefully.

Billy felt a sharpness sting through his chest at actually hearing the words fall from Steve’s swollen lips. And – that was it. That was exactly what Billy had expected to hear. It was what he had known would happen. But actually hearing it was harder than he expected.

Especially after the last couple of days.

Being so close to Steve, helping him, caring for him... Billy had really managed to trick himself. He knew better, he *knew* not to let himself fall for someone like Steve – unobtainable and so far out of his league it wasn’t even funny.

And yet, here he was. Pining after some stupid pretty boy.

I told you so, the voice that sounded like Neil slithered from the back of his mind. He didn’t even have the energy to refute it.

So, instead, he nodded. Eyes downcast and fist clenched to keep himself from crying like a little fucking girl.

But Steve was still looking at him, determined and exhausted and a little frightened. And Billy had no idea what his face was doing, wasn't even sure if he had complete control over it anymore. Not with the way his stomach was sinking and his heart was pounding in his ears. Steve was still talking though, and Billy had to force himself to listen.

“But... the *wanting* to kiss you has been around for... a while.”

And Billy felt suddenly lightheaded.

He blinked, “Define a while.”

Steve looked at him like Billy was going to punch him. But Billy didn't care. Because Steve had just said *to his face* that the kiss has been because of the rut but that he had *wanted* to kiss Billy and he needed to know for just how long. He was oscillating heavily between emotions, and he needed Steve to explain himself *right the fuck now*.

When Steve realized that Billy was absolutely going to sit there and wait for an answer and that he wasn't about to lean over and smack him around for the confession, Steve sighed.

He rubbed over the heated skin of his cheeks as he spoke, “Since after you apologized.” Steve shrugged, looking down and away from Billy, like the admission was shameful, like Billy was about to hate him.

But Billy was stuck on the words Steve had just said. “So... since before you knew?”

And Billy didn’t have to clarify. Steve knew what Billy was asking – since before he had found out Billy was an Omega.

“Yeah.” Steve sighed out like an admission.

Steve looked up at Billy, eyes sad and nervous like Billy was going to beat him up and leave him for good. Because Steve had *liked* him, had *wanted* him before he had known the truth about Billy’s designation. Wanted him when Billy had been just another boy, another *Alpha*. And Billy meant to reassure him. Meant to lighten the mood or smile or do *anything* that would wipe that defeated and frightened look from Steve’s face. But all Billy could do for the moment was stare at him. Because Steve had *wanted to kiss him since January*. Steve *wanted* him.

And before Billy could even think if it was a good idea or not, he was leaning over and kissing Steve.

Pressed his lips to Steve’s – hard and demanding, good hand coming up to hold Steve steady.

Steve was still for a moment, in shock or awe or whatever made him incapable of moving, until something clicked into place and suddenly Steve's arms were gripping tight at Billy's shoulders and neck and hair, pulling him *closer* and kissing him back *harder*.

Billy pulled away, only briefly to look into Steve's eyes. The pupils were a bit wider than they had been before, but still more alert and aware than they had been the last four days, and they looked up at Billy with worry and desperation in equal spades. Because Steve was afraid that Billy would pull back further, that he would get up and leave.

Because the stupid idiot *didn't get it*. Didn't understand that Billy had been all in a lot longer than he had.

So Billy leaned down and pressed an achingly soft kiss to Steve's lips, sweeter than Billy had any right to be, sweeter than he had ever been. He brushed back some of Steve's floppy hair, tucking it gently behind his ears and tried to calm the feeling in his chest at the way Steve was looking at him. "I've wanted to kiss you for a long time, too." Billy said softly, pushing past the anxiety that clawed at his throat.

But Steve just *looked* at him – adoringly, reverently. Like Billy was something *special*. Like those words were the best thing Steve had ever heard. Like he had been waiting on them. Billy had never been looked at like that in his life. Not ever. But especially not by someone like Steve. By someone that *knew* him, the harsh, ugly parts, and liked him anyway.

Steve nodded sort of absently at Billy's quiet confession, the hands in Billy's hair softened as he stroked Billy's curls away from his face.

“You’re serious?” He asked quietly, like he almost didn’t want the answer but was desperate for it anyway.

“I’m not a fucking liar.” Billy said with an attitude that Steve just smiled at.

That smile grew, wider and wider, and Steve tried to curb it but ended up just looking stupid. Billy snorted a little, shaking his head as he looked at Steve fondly, thumb brushing over the warm skin of Steve’s jaw.

“And,” Steve licked his lips, swaying forward further into Billy’s face, gaze moving back and forth between Billy’s eyes and his lips. “It’s not just because I’m an Alpha.”

“Are you kidding me?” Billy huffed dramatically. “I like you in *spite* of that.”

“You like me?” Steve asked softly with a smile, fingers moving softly over Billy’s hair and gripping tightly at the borrowed shirt over his shoulders.

Billy felt himself blush, but didn’t pull away from Steve’s gaze. “Sometimes.” He said with a forced casualness he didn’t actually feel.

“How long?” Steve pressed, coyly.

But the thought sobered Billy a little and he could tell his reaction made Steve sober too. “A long time.” Billy answered honestly, looking into Steve’s honey brown eyes and thinking about what they had looked like ringed in black and blue. “Probably longer than I wanted to admit.”

Steve just nodded, hands never moving from his skin, his hair, gaze never wavering or turning cold. “Are we... are we going to pretend this didn’t happen?”

Billy felt his stomach drop, felt his eyes prick and his skin sting. He *didn’t* want that. Not now that he knew Steve felt the same, not after knowing what those lips felt like against his own. But... if that’s what Steve wanted, he would. It would be soul-crushing, but he’d do it. Because not having Steve in his life wasn’t really an option anymore.

“If that’s what you want.” Billy said much more evenly than he actually felt.

Steve shook his head quickly, moving further into Billy’s space, his hands gripping Billy a bit too tight. “No, no that’s not what I want at all.” He said quickly, almost desperately. “I want *you*. I want to be *with* you.”

“Okay.” Billy felt a little lightheaded at the words, at the way Steve had said them. “Okay, then we’ll... figure it out.”

And they both knew what Billy meant by that – Neil, Hawkins, their peers. No one looked too kindly on two guys getting close, especially two presumed Alphas. Being outed as an Omega would help with the

town, but certainly not with Neil.

They had a lot to decided, a lot to talk about. But not right now.

Right now, Billy wanted to kiss Steve. Wanted to have Steve peel him out of his borrowed clothes and press skin against skin. He wanted to get a hand around Steve's dick and sink down on that knot. Wanted Steve lick over his neck and pin him to the bed.

Steve nodded, eyes bright. His hands moved from their death grip on Billy's shirt, to his neck, and settling against his jaw. Steve leaned in, pressing another devastatingly soft kiss against Billy's mouth, kissing him thoroughly and meaningfully, but so gently. Billy's heart was in his throat, gut twisting, dick so hard and so slick.

Billy knew the moment Steve could smell it. He pulled back just enough to look Billy in the eye, nose flaring as he took in the blooming scent of Billy's arousal, of his slick. His pupils dilated further as the hold on Billy's jaw became firmer.

"This why you gave me your underwear?"

Steve was holding Billy in place, jaw tilted up slightly to meet Steve's gaze. Billy could feel himself blushing, feel the way his skin heated at the words. But, Billy was the last person to ever back down, so he just gave a slight nod and held Steve's heated stare.

"Yeah." Billy shrugged casually. "Knew it'd make this shit easier for

you, so.”

“It did.” Steve said honestly, moving in to scent at Billy’s neck. “Fuck, you smell so good.”

Steve inhaled deeply before pressing small kisses to Billy’s throat, tilting his head back further to nuzzle in against the skin. Billy felt his cock throb in time with his rapid heartrate and it felt almost painful how turned on he was. Embarrassing, really, since Steve had hardly even done anything but kiss him.

But then Steve placed a lingering kiss over the gland in his neck and Billy made a sound that was wildly embarrassing – all high and whiny and desperate. Steve certainly didn’t think it was embarrassing, considering the growl that immediately followed.

“Do you even know what that was like?” Steve panted against his throat. “All I wanted was you. So fucking badly. And then... your *slick*.” Steve moaned nonsensically, licking over Billy’s skin. “Your fucking *come*. Fuck, Billy – you don’t even get it.”

“I have a pretty good idea.” Billy said through heavy breaths, eyes fluttering, good hand gripping tightly at the back of Steve’s sweaty neck.

He hauled Steve in for another kiss – deeper this time. Mouths moving hard, nipping at those soft, pouty lips, practically *begging* for Steve to open up. Billy licked deep into his mouth and gasped at the feeling of Steve kissing him back. Because *this* is what all the rumors had been about – King Steve’s makeout skills and his giant dick. And

Steve could fucking *kiss*, okay. Billy felt winded from it, felt dizzy and swept up in the feeling of Steve's mouth moving against his and the way Steve's hands held him right where he wanted Billy to be. One of Steve's hands slid back, thumb pressing into the bolt of his jaw, tilting his head *just* so, and deepening the kiss.

It only took a minute of Steve kissing him like *that* before Billy desperately began to move closer. And suddenly, Steve's hands moved from Billy's face as he scrabbled and gripped Billy tight around the hips as he got closer. Billy was moving, practically shaking with how much he wanted it, literally crawling into Steve's lap. Sweatpants and a thin sheet all that separated them, separated Billy from the fucking cock he'd been dreaming about.

Billy kissed Steve deeply and desperately, pressing him farther and farther back until Steve's head hit the pillow and Billy was leaning over him, straddling him. Steve's hands gripped tightly at Billy's hips, tugging them *down* against his own, then gasping loudly into Billy's mouth as their hips met, cock rubbing against Billy's.

"Wait," Steve groaned breathlessly, mouth pulled away from Billy's, red and swollen and *wet*. His hand shot up to grip harshly at Billy's hair as Billy licked and sucked across Steve's throat. "Wait. *Billy*. I'm still sort of in rut, you..." He moaned loudly, hips twitching frantically against Billy's as Billy sucked a deep, possessive mark under his ear. "You could go into heat."

Billy pulled away from Steve's neck, looking down at Steve slayed out under him. Panting and breathless and hard as a fucking rock, pupils dilated and shot to shit, scent thick and oppressive as it surrounded them. Billy wouldn't go into heat, not right now, not with the suppressants he'd taken before coming up here, but there was always a chance that it would come early, maybe within the week, from

fucking Steve with his rut pheromones still so heavy in the air.

He shrugged, "I'm due for one anyway."

Steve whined, head tossed back, accentuating the length of his long neck, hips snapping and hands tightening on Billy's hips. "*Fuck.*"

And – *Jesus Christ*, did Steve look good like that, all desperately horny over the thought of Billy spending his heat with him. Flattering wasn't a word that even began to cover it. Fuck, Billy needed Steve in him *right now*.

Billy pulled back, sitting fully on Steve's massive erection, and pulled the borrowed t-shirt over his head, tossing it to the floor. Steve seemed to get the message then, pushing down the sweatpants over the swell of Billy's ass, squeezing and groaning when he realized Billy wasn't wearing any underwear.

"Fucking hell, Billy."

Billy just smirked as he shuffled around to get the sweatpants the rest of the way off, the sheet pulling from Steve's waist with all the wiggling. And, *finally*, Billy got an unobstructed view of that big fucking cock.

Because Billy had kind of seen Steve's dick. Saw it in the showers at school, outlines of it in his swim trunks and jeans. But he had never seen Steve's dick hard and bare, not like this, not when it was *for him*

– and what a fucking sight it was.

Thick and long and red tipped with an angry vein running along the underside and a beautiful fucking knot. Jesus, it was already blown, and Billy knew that was because Steve was coming out of a rut – but *holy fuck* did it turn him on to think that Steve was already knotting and Billy hadn't even touched him yet.

“This for me?” He smirked, eyeing the way Steve's dick twitched, the way pre-come leaked at the tip, the way his knot fucking throbbed at Billy's tone, at his words.

“Yes.” Steve moaned, unashamed.

Billy hummed, leaning forward and pressing another light kiss on Steve's lips. “Put your fingers in me, pretty boy. Want the whole experience for my first time with an Alpha.”

Steve hips spasmed beneath Billy, breath hitching as he quickly gripped a hand tight around his knot, coming across his stomach. “*Fuck me.*” Steve groaned, eyes squeezing shut.

And Billy's dick kicked violently at the fucking display, his hole *dripping*. He could smell it, which meant Steve could, and his breathing becoming a pant as the scent of Steve's come hit him hard.

“I'm trying to.” Billy said a little breathlessly. “Here, let me help you with *that*,” He reached his good hand down to wrap around Steve's

knot, pushing Steve's hand away and slicking even more at the way Steve *gasped* at the feeling of Billy's hands on him. "And you fucking stretch me out."

Steve nodded, eyed heavily lidded, breathing heavy as Billy squeezed tight around his knot, come continuing to pump out across Steve's stomach, and moved his hands back to Billy's ass. Steve moaned at the feeling of Billy's slick practically fucking dripping as he began to press against his hole.

"Jesus fucking Christ, Billy." Steve whined.

And Billy felt his eyes begin to droop as Steve pressed a finger into him, gasping as it slid in *so* easily, followed immediately by another with the same ease.

"Holy fuck." Steve cried at two fingers sliding into Billy's loose, wet hole, at the way Billy gripped his knot, at the amount of come that was still leaking across his stomach. "Billy, this is ridiculous. *This*." He whined, head arching back. "This is already too much."

Billy nuzzled against Steve's neck, kitten-licking over Steve's swollen gland. "Want to stop?"

"No." Steve growled, pulling his fingers out and thrusting them back in. "I don't."

Billy grunted at the feeling of being filled, but he was too wet and too

loose too fucking *horny*, and it just wasn't enough, not right now. "More." He growled against Steve's skin.

Steve thrust into him a few more times with two fingers, moving easily with the rocking of Billy's hips before pulling out and adding a third finger. He pushed them back in and Billy sighed at the feeling. They still went in easily, but now he felt the stretch a little more, gave him something to push back against, to clench around. Steve crooked his fingers, letting them drag deliciously across his prostate and Billy's hips jerked aggressively out of rhythm at the feeling.

"That's it." Steve murmured as he looked up at Billy, still flat on his back.

A high flush had settled over Steve's skin, his eyes wholly focused on Billy's face, changing the way he fucked up into him as the expressions changed across his face. Billy shouldn't be surprised that Steve was so attentive, not after all the shit he had heard about *King Steve*, but it was still an experience to have all of Steve's focus solely on him to say the least.

Steve rubbed particularly hard against that spot with three fingers long enough that Billy's thighs began to shake, his breath coming out in huffs. Billy released Steve's deflating knot quickly and reached down to fist his own dick before he came, head hanging, eyes squeezed shut. It was a lot of sensation that Billy wasn't really used to – because while Billy was the last person anyone would call a virgin, his experience with guys and Alphas in particular was... limited.

He had Neil to thank for that. And Max.

But, Steve was different. Different from the last time he attempted to do this, different from anyone Billy had ever met. Because... Billy was sort of in love with him, and Billy had never really felt like that before.

Steve let up on that particular spot at Billy's reaction and began thrusting three fingers lazily, taking time to stretch Billy out further. Which, Billy appreciated, because even though he was wet and loose and wildly turned on, Steve was still *big* and that knot even bigger. Billy was adamant he'd take it all – been dreaming about it, actually. So Billy would take all of Steve's teasing if it got him wide enough to fit that thing.

He took in a deep breath through his nose and opened his eyes, immediately finding Steve's. Steve's dark eyes were blown, his pale skin flushed and red with arousal and the lingering rut still in his system – Billy was momentarily worried that this would prolong it, but even if it did, the extended cycle would subside fairly quickly after he knotted Billy a few times.

His cock literally jumped in his hand at the thought, pre-come drooling out onto Steve's deflated knot.

Steve's scent bloomed around them, and Billy's gaze went a little hazy with in. "What're you thinking about?" Steve nodded toward the sticky droplets leaking from Billy's red cock, scissoring his fingers slowly and gently, making Billy's eyes flutter.

Billy swallowed thickly and tried to clear his head. "Your knot." He answered honestly.

Steve growled, sitting up. His fingers slipped from Billy's hole in the process, pulling an embarrassing whine from Billy's throat at the feeling. Steve didn't leave him waiting for long, pushing Billy gently onto his back and crawling over him.

Billy was bigger than Steve – it was just a fact. Steve might have a slight height advantage on him, but Billy was broader and heavier and more muscled. But with Steve leaning over him the way he was, scent deep and dark, eyes trained solely on him... Billy didn't feel like the guy who'd taken Steve out at the Byers' house. No, he felt more like all those girls who sighed dreamily as they recounted their dates with Steve Harrington.

Billy never would've thought he'd feel this way – young and vulnerable and *wanted* by someone that Billy had so desperately desired. But, here he was.

Steve leaned down and kissed him, soft and lingering and filled with so much desperation that it took Billy's breath away. He traced Billy's lips with his tongue, delved inside for a taste, lips moving gracefully with purpose. Billy was good at sex, okay. He was good at fucking and getting girls off, getting them wet. But, Steve... shit, *Steve* knew how to kiss.

He pulled away from Billy's lips, kissing his cheek in a way that made Billy blush and then made him mortified for doing so. But Steve didn't even pause to make fun of him, didn't even really notice, just kept kissing a gentle trail to his jaw, then beneath. He kissed behind Billy's ear in the same spot that Steve was bound to have a hickey, then his sensitive throat, all the way to his gland. Steve pressed a soft kiss to it, then a sloppy, lingering one, then an outright lick – which

had Billy squirming and panting, thighs dropping open further.

Steve dropped down to lay against Billy, smooth, heated skin against skin. That heavy cock laid in the cradle of Billy's hip and thigh, burning almost with the heat left over from rut, shifting against him every time Steve moved. Billy's own aching dick was pressed deliciously against Steve's pubic bone, the wet head knocking against Steve's bellybutton as Billy squirmed in arousal.

He gripped hard onto Steve's shoulder with his good hand as Steve released his gland and kissed down his collarbone, nipping and dragging his teeth against the delicate skin there. Billy wanted so desperately for Steve to mark him up, wanted a constant reminder of this moment, wanted everyone to look at it and wonder *who* Billy had let use their teeth. Historically, he didn't. Sure, sometimes a chick would get mouthy and give him a hickey, and that was fine or whatever – but teeth? Billy didn't do teeth. Didn't do *marks* that would linger longer than a couple days.

But Billy wanted Steve's, even if no one could know it was his.

Steve pressed on, unaware of Billy's internal desperation, and paused just briefly to lick over a nipple, smirking when Billy gave a groan. Steve could feel the way Billy's dick kicked against his stomach and gave another experimental lick. When Billy's reaction was the same, he closed his mouth over the nub and *sucked*. Billy's breath hitched and his hips snapped up to rub against Steve's, his hand moving to clamp over the back of Steve's neck.

He must like that, because as soon as Billy's hand held there firmly, Steve sort of whined and rubbed his forehead against Billy's chest. It seemed to speed him up and suddenly Billy had Steve eyelevel with

his absolutely throbbing cock.

Red and swollen and dripping at the tip, Steve batted Billy's hand away from his cock and gripped it himself. Billy's head fell back against the mattress, eyes fluttering closed, as Steve began to stroke Billy firmly. Fuck – it felt good to have Steve's hands on him. It didn't take Steve long to start up a truly inspiring pace that had Billy rasping out these short panting breaths, abs tensing. And then Billy felt Steve's tongue against the head.

Billy's eyes shot open, propping up onto his elbows to watch with wide eyes as Steve's mouth sunk over the head of Billy's cock, his hand fisted over the shaft. "*Fuck.*" Billy groaned. "Steve, I'm gonna come."

But Steve didn't stop, just sunk his pouty mouth further down Billy's dick, hand moving rapidly over what he couldn't fit. And Billy was breathing so hard, and his eyes kept closing, and he was so, so, close.

And then Steve reached down to Billy's wet hole and slid his fingers back in, rubbing against his prostate – and Billy was done. There was no way he was ever going to survive something like this. Absolutely never.

He came with a broken groan, stomach muscles tensing, hips lifting, choking Steve a little. But Steve worked him through it, sputtered around the come and pulled his mouth up so just the head was on his tongue, hand still stroking Billy through his orgasm.

Billy was panting as he looked at Steve – lying between Billy's

trembling thighs, lips puffy and red and covered in Billy's come, sucking on his swollen cockhead. Steve was pretty all the time, but Billy thought he looked fucking ridiculous like this. How Nancy could have ever ditched him was just beyond Billy, because he was never giving Steve up now. Not if he could help it.

"Shit." Billy said through labored breaths, cock twitching on Steve's tongue as those fingers shifted inside of him.

Steve released Billy's dick, letting it slide from his mouth, and licked his lips. He was going to give Billy a fucking coronary, Jesus.

Because, let's be real here, Billy has gay porn stashed away in his room, hidden beneath big tits and blonde hair and hot rods, but nothing has ever compared to the way Steve looked right now. Billy could get off to this particular image for the rest of his goddamn life and it'd never get old.

"Have you really never been with an Alpha before?" Steve asked as he began thrusting the fingers that were still inside Billy.

Billy let out a breath through his nose as Steve finger fucked him through the aftershocks of his orgasm. He fell back against the mattress when it hurt too much to keep resting on his elbows because of his broken fucking arm, running a hand through his messy hair as he tried not to gasp at the feeling of Steve inside of him.

"Been sucked off by one." Billy tried to sound casual, but he wasn't sure how well he was pulling it off with Steve continuing to stretch him out. "And fucked an Alpha girl once, but... No. I haven't. Not

like this.”

He could feel himself blushing, like fully blushing at the admittance. But he knew that Steve wouldn't judge him for not being as experienced in that department. Hell – Steve had never been with an Omega as an Alpha, seeing as he just presented, so who would he be to fucking talk.

A deep purr-like growl came from Steve's chest as he began kissing Billy's inner thighs, licking the slick and come he found there. “So it'll be new for both of us.” Steve nipped at the sensitive skin, leaving a bruise and Billy felt himself shiver. “Promise me you'll tell me if you don't want something.”

“Fuck off.” Billy ground out.

Steve bit down harder, pulling an actual whine from Billy's throat. “I mean it, Hargrove.”

Billy kicked Steve's hip and bent his head to glare at him. “Obviously, shithead. And I expect you to do the fucking same, got it?”

Steve tried to curb a smirk, but just nodded, pulling his fingers from Billy's dripping hole and moving to push Billy's thighs further up and apart. “Okay.” He bent Billy, causing his hips to tilt and kept eye contact as he leaned down to lick over his wet hole.

Billy groaned, deep and loud, neck arching back and hitting the

mattress beneath him. He couldn't look at Steve eat him out, literally just couldn't or he would die. The purposeful drag of Steve's tongue over his puffy rim caused sparks of pleasure of lick up his spine, his dick hardening back up quicker than it ever had outside of heat. But, honestly, Billy would have to be legally dead for his dick not to get hard at Steve Harrington tongue-fucking him into oblivion.

Steve licked into him, deep and powerful, sucked on his rim, tugged at it with his mouth, until Billy was basically hyperventilating. It didn't last long, mostly because Billy could see Steve grinding himself into the bed, but *fuck* – did it feel fucking fantastic. Billy sort of wanted to see if Steve could drag another orgasm out of him just like this, but he wanted Steve inside of him more.

When Steve pulled his mouth away from Billy's ass, his lips and chin were shiny with slick, his eyes dilated and his breathing heavy. "Do you smell like this?" Steve asked as crawled up Billy's body, laying over him, warm skin almost stinging. "When you're not on blockers?"

Billy wrapped his arms immediately around Steve as his body covered Billy's, thighs cradling his hips, hand in the back of his hair. "Do I smell like my slick?" Billy asked, confused.

"Yeah," Steve asked between kisses, letting him taste himself on Steve's lips. It shouldn't be as hot as it was. "I can't remember what you smell like – just that it was *really* good. And I've never smelt your slick before, assuming that you've been slick around me." He smirked and Billy bit at Steve's pouty lower lip in retaliation for being a fucking smartass. "But it smells fucking good, and, I don't know where I'm going with this." He laughed.

"I think you're fucking high on endorphins right now." Billy

interjected.

“Hmm.” Steve hummed, nuzzling Billy’s throat. “Probably. Or I’m going crazy from being so fucking horny.”

“Now, see,” Billy said playfully, pushing Steve’s floppy hair away from his face. “If only there was a way to fix that.”

Steve smiled, bright and playful and *happy*. He looked happier than Billy had ever seen him, loose and relaxed and comfortable. It made Billy feel full, made him feel complete.

He reached down between them to wrap a hand around Steve’s cock – hard and throbbing, pre-come oozing at the tip. Steve sighed as Billy touched him, face burrowed in Billy’s neck. Billy started shifting, sliding down a little on the bed, angling his hips. Thankfully Steve seemed to get the message and pulled himself away from Billy’s throat to actually move himself into position. Billy let go of Steve’s cock, bracing himself up on his elbows to watch as Steve once again titled Billy’s hips where he wanted them, but this time moving forward to press his own against them.

Billy watched as Steve pressed his thick fucking cock against his entrance, looking at Billy through his lashes to make sure it was okay before beginning to push in. Billy’s breath caught in his throat at the feeling of Steve splitting him open, his head dropping back, eyes fluttering at the fucking feeling.

Steve was mewling, the sound going right to Billy’s hard dick. He slid in pretty far with how wet and loose Billy was already, but he’d have

to fuck it the rest of the way in, or they'd have to change position to get him deeper. And neither of them seemed capable to switching around at the moment, not with the punched-out little noises Steve was making, not with the way Billy felt like he couldn't breathe.

So Steve held tightly to Billy's splayed thighs, pulling out a fraction before thrusting back in. It was slow and deep and felt *so fucking good*. Billy felt his arm begin to ache from being up on his elbows, so he let his back fall against the bed and tried to stave off the blush that was ready to break over his skin at how he suddenly felt like all the girls he had fucked in the past, like all the other Omegas Steve once had in this exact position.

Billy felt a flush of anger wash over him at the thought of Steve with someone else. Because how many others had seen Billy's current view – Steve flushed and panting, pouty mouth dropped open, eyes dazed as he watched his cock fuck open a willing hole? Who else got to experience Steve Harrington looking so fucking beautiful and undone with a blush high on his cheeks and his prefect hair all loose and floppy around him?

He leaned forward and grabbed Steve before he could think about it, hauling him down on top of Billy, so they were chest to chest. It changed the angle and Billy groaned at the feeling, knees digging into Steve's slim hips. Billy kissed him, messy and kind of angry and definitely too possessive for what they were to each other right now. But Billy didn't care, he'd make Steve see that Billy was the best choice, that Billy loved him more.

Steve kissed him back, just as passionately, hips never stopping as he fucked deep into Billy. Fucking hell, Billy felt stretched wide, felt so fucking *full* as he clenched around Steve's massive cock. Billy had used fingers, *fingers*, and they were nothing at all compared to how

Steve felt inside of him. They kissed deeply, their breath hitching each time Steve moved within him, and more than once they were just breathing each other's air as their lips touched because Steve would speed up before slowing back down. For someone who was just coming out of a rut and was hard enough to hammer nails, Steve seemed to be in no rush, fucking Billy slow and hard and thoroughly. Like he wanted Billy to remember him as much as Billy did.

"Faster, c'mon." Billy sighed, reaching down to fist his neglected dick.

Steve pulled back a hair, giving himself room to hold himself up above Billy, and began snapping his hips. The change pulled a moan from Billy's throat, his hand speeding up. Steve kissed over Billy's neck as he pounded Billy into the mattress, licking over the swollen gland, scent marking him so thoroughly that Billy would have to shower more than once if he planned on ever going home again, Christ.

Then, Steve shifted slightly as he kissed up Billy's neck, changing the angle, and Billy felt those sparks begin to climb up his back. Felt his skin prick almost painfully at how good it fucking felt. He gasped, the groaned, meeting Steve's thrusts to make sure he hit that spot every fucking time.

Billy was going to come. His cock dripping pre-come all across their stomachs, throbbing in time with his rapid heartbeat. With Steve's cock dragging across that spot with every thrust, there was no reality in which Billy *didn't* come. He didn't even have the ability to communicate that to Steve, not with how *good* it felt, not with that prefect pressure and the hand flying over his cock.

He came with big gasping breaths, his eyes squeezed shut, thighs shaking against Steve's hips.

Steve groaned loudly in his ear at the feeling of Billy clamping down around him, shoving in as deep as he could go into Billy's wet heat, shifting his hips just slightly as his knot began to swell. Billy fucking *whined*, high and loud in his throat at the feeling of Steve's giant fucking knot stretching him wide, pressing insistently against his prostate and making more come leak out from his spent dick. "*Jesus fuck.*" Billy groaned.

Steve was huffing into Billy's neck, face hot and sweaty, grinding his hips against Billy's ass best he could with his knot plugging him full. Billy felt over-sensitive and overstimulated from the pressure against his prostate, but Steve was coming and coming and *coming* inside of him and Billy couldn't move even if he wanted to. So he laid there with Steve's weight pressing him into the bed, knot splitting him open, and clenched hard around it just to hear Steve's fucked-out whine.

Billy had no idea how long they'd be tied together, and he was too tired to even ask. So he just ran his good hand through Steve's hair, petting him as Steve's breathing returned back to normal. Steve would drop light little kisses against Billy's skin as he burrowed into the spot between Billy's neck and shoulder, his weight comforting as he draped himself over Billy.

They should talk, check in with each other, figure out what *I've liked you for a long time* really meant. But Billy was tired, and it had been a long couple days for both of them. Which was probably why he didn't notice his eyes getting heavy, not with Steve's warm body lying atop of him, with Steve's potent scent lingering like a haze around them.

They'd figure it out later.

Notes for the Chapter:

this is basically just porn. enjoy!

15. Chapter 15

Billy woke up to Steve's lips kissing gently over his neck.

He blinked his eyes open slowly, groggy from falling asleep after he had already been awake early this morning. He was warm and sweaty and sticky, dried slick and come clinging to his skin, which absolutely fucking disgusting, but Billy couldn't curb the smile that spread over his face. Sticky and gross or not, it didn't matter. Because Billy had gotten Steve Harrington. Billy would roll around in fucking garbage if it meant Steve would stay right where he was currently.

Steve was a gentle weight on top of him, obviously holding his body up as not to crush Billy in his sleep, but warm skin still pressed deliciously together. He was nuzzling Billy's throat softly in an effort not to wake him up, but it had anyway. Billy couldn't say he was mad about it.

His dick was hard and pressed against Steve's thigh, but the arousal wasn't insistent or overwhelming. It just felt good. To be *under* Steve, pressed against him the way he was. Slow and syrupy and sweet. His hole throbbed a little, kind of in time with his heartbeat if he focused on it, but it didn't hurt. Just a pressure from being knotted. But Steve had stretched him out and fucked him *so* good that Billy had been more than ready to take his knot when it came.

It didn't hurt and that was more than Billy had expected from being with an Alpha. But Steve was... *Steve* and Billy didn't know why he had expected any different.

He wrapped his arms around Steve's back, fingers tracing over warm,

smooth skin. Steve pulled back from where he had been breathing in Billy's scent – Billy wondered what Steve would do if he was off blockers and his full, unmuted, Omega scent stank up the room. Or if he was actually in heat and that scent permeated the air. Billy had to hope that Steve would like his scent and based off his reactions to Billy's scent while on blockers, Billy felt like he wasn't way off base in thinking that Steve would like it. Especially not after he had went on about Billy's slick the way he had.

Steve pulled back and smiled as he looked down at Billy, settling against him more firmly now that he was awake. He looked clear-eyed, more normal than he'd been in days. He looked like *Steve*. Knotting Billy had definitely broken the last lingerings of rut, thank fuck. Billy wasn't sure how many more days he had in him to go on like they had been.

"Hey." Billy muttered, voice deep and rough and sleepy.

Steve leaned down and pressed a kiss to Billy's lips. "Hey." He muttered back, so close to Billy's face he could hardly see him.

"Obviously I did not mean to pass out like that." Billy said as he ran a hand up Steve's spine to tangle in the back of his hair. "And I don't want to hear one fucking comment about your dick knocking me out."

Steve snorted a little, that goofy little smile pulling at his lips. "I definitely wasn't going to say that." He settled in Billy's chest and now Billy could see him properly. "That'd just be tacky."

Billy rolled his eyes as he played with Steve's hair. "And god forbid a Harrington be *tacky*."

Steve just smirked and kissed Billy's collarbone. "Shut up."

"You know how to make me, pretty boy."

It was the flirtiest Billy had ever been with Steve. And even though they had literally just fucked, it still felt like a risk. Made Billy's heart sort of pound off rhythm, like Steve would pull back and say *this isn't what you think it is, man*. But he didn't, Steve just smirked and nodded a little from where he was camped out on Billy's chest.

"Yeah, I've got a pretty good idea."

Billy wrapped his arms a bit tighter around Steve's back, knees coming up to press into Steve's hips, and flipped them. Rolled them over toward the edge of the bed, Billy pushing himself up to sit on Steve's thighs. Steve just looked up at him with starry eyes and let himself be pinned by Billy – which, sort of wasn't unusual for *Steve* but definitely was for an Alpha, especially a brand new one. But Steve didn't make any sort of move to push Billy off him, didn't growl at the very obvious dominance display. Billy felt his heart beat weirdly in his chest.

Steve was hard. Dick curved up toward his belly, but not like it had been earlier this morning – not leaking with a blown knot. Billy was hard too, little droplets of sticky precome beading at the head as he felt Steve's come and slick drip out of him with each movement. It was fucking gross, but also really fucking hot and more than a little

possessive, and Billy wanted Steve back in him more than he'd ever wanted anything else.

Because Billy didn't think he'd ever get Steve Harrington, and now here he was – spread out so beautifully beneath Billy, and Steve *wanted* him.

So, Billy leaned down and kissed him.

Bit at his lower lip and licked deep into his mouth, pressed his lips against Steve's over and over and over again. And Steve let him. Reached up and tangled a hand in Billy's hair to keep him there, tilted Billy's jaw to deepen the kiss.

Billy scooted up when the kissing became too much, but at the same time not enough, and moved so that he was sitting on Steve's cock – just not exactly in the way he wanted. So Billy was forced to break the kiss and sit up, raising up on his knees so he could grip Steve's heavy cock and line it up with his entrance.

Steve let out a loud exhale as he realized what Billy was doing, swollen mouth parted, eyes zeroed in on where Billy was guiding his dick. It felt fucking good to see Steve look at him like that – dazed and hungry and desperate for more, but absolutely content to let Billy do what he wanted. That's something he loved most about Steve, he was usually more than happy to let Billy set the pace for whatever they were doing, and Billy had never appreciated something more.

He couldn't contain a gasp as the head of Steve's big fucking dick pushed past his tender rim, couldn't stop his head from dropping or

his eyes from drooping as he slid down and bottomed out. Steve was breathing harshly, hands gripping tightly at Billy's hips, supporting his weight. Billy had been well-stretched and fucked open, but it still felt like Steve was too big, like he could feel it up in his fucking throat every time he breathed. But, *fuck*, did it feel good to have Steve inside him. Billy had *dreamed* of this, of sitting on Steve's cock just as he was right now. It was still surreal that it was actually happening.

Billy was breathing harshly as he settled himself on Steve's hips, on Steve's dick, essentially squirming in an effort to relieve the pressure and making Steve groan. But he didn't buck his hips or push Billy to go faster; just groaned and gasped and gripped Billy's hips so tightly he'd have faint finger shaped bruises in the crests of his hips by tomorrow. Not that Billy minded, not at all, welcomed them in fact, to prove that this wasn't some pheromone-laced fever dream that he'd wake up from disappointed and heartbroken.

He leaned forward a little, bracing himself on Steve's collarbones, fingers curling over the tops of his shoulders and pressing into the mattress beneath then. Then he slid himself up Steve's cock slowly before dropping back down.

Billy felt his breath stutter as he started up a rhythm – slow but forceful – and Steve was sort of losing his mind a little. Eyes shut tight like he was overwhelmed by the sensation, pouty mouth dropped open as he took big gulping breaths, moaning every time Billy bottomed out.

It was overly wet and sloppy from all the of slick Billy was leaking and the mass amount of come Steve had pumped and plugged into him. The squelching noises made something hot settle in Billy's groin, the knowing that Steve's come was easing the way made his cock

hang heavy as it rubbed insistently across Steve's abs. Steve seemed to be having a similar reaction, if the way his hands moved from clenching Billy's hips to tightly gripping Billy's ass was any indication.

The way Steve was holding onto his ass shifted something, making Billy's channel tighter as Steve fucked up into him and Billy couldn't hold back the deep groan that forced its way out of his mouth at the feeling. Steve's eyes shot open at the sound, looking up at Billy with blown out eyes and that fucking *mouth* hanging open as he took in deep gulping breaths of Billy's ripe scent.

It shouldn't be so fucking hot to have Steve desperate for his scent – muted as it was on blockers – but Billy could absolutely care less about *shoulds* or *shouldn'ts* when he had Steve's massive cock in his ass, writhing beneath him. Couldn't care less at all.

Steve sat up suddenly, using that old athletic core strength that was really doing it for him, hauling Billy more firmly onto his lap and his dick. Billy straight up *whined* as he sank down harshly on Steve's cock, head tipped back as he panted wildly through his open mouth. Steve was still clenching his ass cheeks tight and began jerking his hips in little upward thrusts that rubbed hard against his prostate with every movement, making Billy's thighs shake where they were spread wide on either side of Steve's hips.

He felt Steve's mouth on his bared neck. Kisses and licks and teeth dragging over his gland. Billy reached down quickly to squeeze around the head of his cock as he came hard across both of their stomachs, clenching intensely around Steve's dick, trapping it against his sensitive prostate.

“Holy shit.” Billy breathed out around gasping breaths, his ass throbbing in time with his frantic heart.

Steve sat still, hands still gripping Billy’s ass, also breathing heavy. Billy could feel his knot begin to swell fully, locking them together. He clenched around it unconsciously, goosebumps raising over his skin almost painfully at the whine Steve let out at the feeling. Then he did it again just because he could, the power-trip going to his head as he smirked at Steve.

It lasted all of five seconds before Steve tackled him onto his back, pushing his thighs up and back against the bed, fucking him as best he could with his knot swelled. Billy moaned at the feeling of Steve’s giant fucking knot tugging against his rim, at the way Steve’s cockhead rubbed insistently against his prostate.

Steve leaned forward and kissed him, hard and wet and messy. Bit at his lips and licked the roof of his mouth, kissing him deep until Billy was full of warmth and love and desperation. And then Steve was coming.

And, Jesus fucking Christ, did he have a lot of come. How the fuck did he still have so much after the last couple of days?

They were both breathing heavily, slick with sweat and come – new and old. Billy was getting in the shower once Steve’s knot went down. He didn’t care how hot Steve Harrington was or how much he had been obsessed with the guy or his dick, Billy was not going another round until they were free from crusts and flakes.

Steve burrowed into Billy's neck, inhaling gently as their breathing steadied and their heartrates dropped back down to normal. Steve was a comforting weight on top of him, heavy because he was a human person with muscles, but not too heavy, not the way Billy's bulk would be. He wrapped his arms around Steve's sweaty back, fingers tracing over the smooth skin and wondering if there were freckles there that he couldn't see. Steve sighed happily nuzzling closer.

They laid just like that for a while, not moving until Steve's knot started to go down and he could pull out without hurting Billy. He flopped back onto his back, running a hand through his wild, fluffy hair and Billy felt possessive over the fact that he was the only one who got to see Steve like this – disheveled and undone.

Steve's other hand found his, entwining their fingers and gently locking their hands together as they laid there quietly, the afterglow settling over them. It was nice – nicer than Billy had ever hoped for, ever thought he'd get. But here he was, lying naked and sated in bed with a boy that he *loved*, with a boy that wanted him.

It was all the things he never thought Neil would let him have. Billy felt a smile creep over his face as looked up at Steve's ceiling, felt tears in his eyes sting a little about what this all could mean.

That delicious, quiet afterglow only lasted a few minutes however, because the door to Steve's room slammed open and suddenly Nancy was running narrowed eyes over the two of them. Steve moved quickly to grab the sheet and cover them up.

"Nancy!" Steve growled. "What the hell?"

Jonathan appeared in the doorway behind Nancy, lingering in the hallway but not entering, still respecting Steve's wishes even now. His broad shoulders stuck out with the way he was awkwardly shoving his hands into the pockets of his sleep pants and sheepishly looking at the floor.

"What the hell?" Nancy shot back angrily. "*What the hell?* What the hell yourself, Steve. Are you kidding me right now?"

"Wheeler, chill out."

"And *you*." Nancy pointed at Billy. "I asked you if this was going to be a problem and you said no! Now look at you two." She gestured at both of them before glaring over her shoulder at Jonathan. "I leave for a couple hours, and everything goes to shit. None of you should be trusted."

"He's out of rut, Wheeler, so why don't you tone down the melodramatics, alright." Billy shot back, trying to appear calm and casual when really he felt like his skin was crawling from people seeing him like this, with Steve.

Nancy just stared at him, her arms crossing over her chest. "And what about you?"

Billy stared her down, a sheet covering his dick but not the cum staining his stomach or the marks from Steve's eager mouth. He knew what she was asking with her harsh blue eyes and rigid shoulders.

“I’m not in heat.” Billy said clearly, keeping her gaze. “And he wasn’t in rut when I came up here this morning. So get the fuck out.” He growled loudly.

Jonathan’s head snapped up at the sound of Billy’s voice, the scent of anger crackling around them – in part from him, in part from Nancy. Jonathan looked disappointed, worried, and Billy had to swallow down the urge to apologize to the guy. He was definitely getting too accustomed to Byers’ scent and energy.

Nancy held Billy’s stern gaze, arms still crossed tightly over her chest, and when she spoke, Billy felt like she had punched him in the chest.

“Tell me, how are you any better than Ashley right now?”

Steve’s angry scent whipped around the room, spicy and thick enough that Billy legitimately sneezed, and Nancy took an unconscious step back toward the door. Steve got up quickly, grabbing the pajama pants that Billy had been wearing earlier this morning and rounding the bed to stand before Nancy once they sat on his hips.

He was flushed and sweaty, covered dried, flakey come, and hickies; a slight rosy flush still lingered over his bare chest and cheeks. But the look in his eyes was serious, and a little sad.

Nancy looked up at him, big eyes all wide and worried. Billy knew Wheeler was small, but seeing her and Steve parallel to each other

really put it in perspective. It made uncomfortable things swirl in Billy's stomach at the sight – because Nancy was dainty and small and pretty. Billy was... not that. Seeing them now just reminded Billy that Nancy had once been the one in this bed.

But Steve just shook his head. “No. You don't get to do this, Nance. Not you.”

Nancy just looked up at him heartbroken, disappointment lingering in her eyes. “I'm just worried about you.” She stressed, a pleading quality in her voice that Billy knew was actually genuine, but played out like a practiced Omegan distress whine. He expected Steve's shoulders to round out at the sound, the sizzle in his scent to settle – but it didn't.

Instead, Steve sighed. Reaching up a hand to push back his hair from his face, eyes and nose angled toward the ceiling before they dropped back toward Nancy and Jonathan. Steve looked between them, lingering a little more on Jonathan's earnest eyes with each pass.

“Thank you for helping me.” Steve said honestly. “I really appreciate you two coming when I called the other night and staying here the whole time. But,” He sighed, tired but composed. “Why don't we meet up tomorrow and talk?”

Jonathan nodded easily, taking a step back from the doorway. Nancy lingered in front of Steve, staring up at his face with a mixture of emotions that Billy couldn't quite decipher because he didn't know Wheeler well enough to do so. Steve looked down at her with solemn eyes and a bare torso covered in Billy's handiwork that he didn't even bother trying to hide.

“Nance.” Jonathan said softly from the hallway, calling her to him. Nancy drew in a deep breath at the sound of her name and let it out slowly as she turned and walked out of Steve’s bedroom. “My mom said she’d stop by with some dinner later.” Jonathan said easily. “She just wants to check in on you, make sure there’s no lingering side effects from a sudden cycle.”

Steve smiled a little, his shoulders relaxing. “Thanks, man.”

Jonathan nodded and took another step from the door, stopping only to look up at Steve in that gentle way of his. “She shouldn’t have said that, she’s just... worried.” He leaned a little to catch Billy’s gaze. “Sorry, Billy.”

He shook his head, “You got nothing to be sorry for, Jonny.”

Jonathan smiled tightly, nodded, then looked back at Steve. “Call me tomorrow?”

Steve nodded, “Promise.”

Once Jonathan was gone and the front door opened and closed, Steve’s posture completely lost its rigidity, his scent finally settling. He turned toward Billy – an absolute *sight* with the stretched-out sleep pants sitting low on his sharp hipbones, stomach muscles covered in a mixture of their come, dark bruises from Billy’s mouth scattered across his pale skin.

“Want to take a shower?”

Billy found himself asking. And Steve just nodded, a little tired-eyed.

Billy pushed himself from the bed and walked out of Steve’s room and into the bathroom, completely naked. Steve followed quickly, staring at Billy’s bare ass as he reached in to turn on the water.

It was weird to be in here again, when days before he was jerking off onto his own slick soaked briefs with Steve’s rut scent in his nose. Or days before that when they had to drag Steve in here to cool him down when the rut first hit.

Things had really changed in the last couple hours that made those few days ago seem like a lifetime.

They still had a lot to talk about. To decide. To fucking figure out.

But right now, Billy was annoyed at Nancy's words and he felt fucking disgusting and his first time with an Alpha, with another boy, had been nothing short of goddamn spectacular, and Steve *liked him*. So Billy was going to take a shower with Steve and kiss him beneath the warm spray. And Steve very much seemed to be onboard with that idea, seeing as those sleep pants were already shed as Billy stepped into the tub, Steve hot on his heels.

Billy stepped right under the spray, letting the hot water crash over the rat's nest he was calling hair.

Steve stepped in behind him, tentatively placing his hands on Billy's hips. And when Billy didn't respond by punching him, he pressed himself right up along Billy's back, wrapping his arms around Billy's stomach, forehead pressed against Billy's shoulder. Steve was holding him, similar to the hug in his bedroom and the way Steve had draped himself over Billy at the start of the rut.

And Billy let him. Pushed back and leaned into Steve's strong body, knowing he'd take it, knowing that even though Billy was bigger and stronger than him, Steve wouldn't let him fall. Because Steve was strong too, just in a less obvious way.

"I'm sorry about Nancy." Steve said quietly over the hum of the water.

Billy let one of his hands fall to where Steve's were clasped over his stomach, wide palm fitting comfortably over Steve's bony knuckles. "Don't apologize for Wheeler, Steve. She's a big girl, she can say she's sorry all on her own."

"I just..." Steve sighed, rubbing his closed eyes over Billy's wet skin. "I just don't want what she said to like, *ruin* this. Or scare you away."

He let his own eyes close as he tilted his head into the spray, his heart beating aggressively at Steve's words. "After everything we've been through this summer alone, you think Nancy Wheeler is enough to scare me?"

Steve snorted and Billy felt the air across the back of his shoulders. "I guess not."

"I understand what you were implying, pretty boy." Billy sighed, fingers fidgeting over Steve's. "We haven't really decided what *this* is yet."

"Yeah." Steve muttered quietly against Billy's skin, and Billy didn't like the worry lacing Steve's tone.

So he pulled out of the embrace, turning around, Steve letting him go. They stood in front of each other, just how Steve had stood before Nancy a few minutes ago – albeit wetter and more naked. Billy felt his stomach cramp as he opened his mouth to say something he absolutely never thought he would say to Steve's face, but here he was.

"I want to be with you."

Steve's eyes started shining as his own words from his morning tumbled inelegantly out of Billy's mouth. He reached out and pushed back soaked curls from Billy's face, tucking them sweetly behind his ears. The move was so endearing that Billy felt his own eyes start to sting. Because Billy wasn't used to gentle, and he certainly didn't deserve it from these hands, not after the things that he had done to Steve. But here they were, standing in a shower, trying to keep it together over something so simple.

"Do you really?" Steve asked quietly, fingers gently smoothing down Billy's neck, eyes downcast. "Because... I don't know if I can do casual." He seemed embarrassed by the words. "I don't know... I don't know if I can watch you be with someone else."

Billy reached over and tilted Steve's face back up, then leaned in and kissed him softly. A simple press of lips together, the sweetest kiss Billy had ever given. When he pulled back Steve looked closer to tears than Billy had ever seen him.

"Sorry," Steve said quietly, reaching up to dig the heels of his hands into his eyes. "I don't know what's happening."

Billy only hesitated for a moment before he reached out slowly and wrapped his arms around Steve in a hug. Steve sort of collapsed into him, just like he had all the times that Billy had embraced him before.

"It's alright, pretty boy." Billy stroked a hand over the wet skin of Steve's back, tracing over the goosebumps he found there. "It's normal to get like this after a cycle."

"What, emotional?" Steve scoffed.

Billy gently pinched his side and then wrapped his arms more firmly around Steve's back. "Yeah, asshole."

"Oh."

They held each other for a little while and in the warm cocoon of the shower, Billy felt more comfortable than he had in years.

There was a part of him that felt like this would be weird. A part of him that wondered why he wasn't balking at the idea of this quiet sort of intimacy. A part of him that should feel itchy and wired at being held, at being wanted. But he didn't. He should, but he didn't.

Because there were things that Billy had wanted for a long time but often didn't let himself think about. He wanted softness and warmth and love.

And, for the first time, he didn't feel as unlovable as Neil had made him out to be.

Being in Steve's arms, in Steve's shower, cloaked in Steve's scent, made Billy feel different. It made him feel all those things that he's always been so desperate for, but wouldn't name for fear of them not coming true.

The fact that they were happening in the middle of Nowhere, Indiana sucked, the fact that he always intended to back to California sucked too.

It was getting ahead of himself – way ahead – but maybe Steve would want to come home with him. Maybe he'd be able to have his cake and eat it too if he was lucky.

That was, if Neil didn't kill him first. Because that, unfortunately, was a real possibility if he found out about Steve.

But when Steve eventually pulled out of Billy's embrace and began to run soapy fingers through Billy's matted curls all slow and gently, Billy didn't care about Neil. He didn't care about the consequences of what would happen if his dad found out. Hell – he'd go downtown tomorrow and spray paint *Billy Hargrove's An Omega Whore* on the theatre marquee if it meant he got to keep Steve here, just like this.

Their shower would end eventually, and they would have to decide how to proceed past *I want to be with you*, and Steve was going to have to talk with Nancy and Jonathan tomorrow. But for now, Billy could live in this moment.

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm not dead!! thank you to everyone who knocked on my coffin & was like, 'you in there??' appreciate you, babes.

Author's Note:

come yell at me over on tumblr! @ellieohno